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BARBARA



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THE STORY OF
B A R B A R A ;

HER SPLENDID MISERY, AND HER GILDED CAGE

J Nobel

BY THE AUTHOR OF

“**LADY AUDLEY’S SECRET,**” “**ISHMAEL,**”

ETC. ETC.

Stereotyped Edition

LONDON :
SIMPKIN, MARSHALL, HAMILTON, KENT & CO.,
STATIONERS’ HALL COURT. LIMITED.

1891.

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EXPLANATION.

THIS novel was commenced in the columns of the *World* newspaper under the title of 'Splendid Misery.' Copyright in the title-words was asserted by the proprietor of a halfpenny weekly journal, in which was published, and in which lay buried for years, a short tale with the title 'Splendid Misery.' Under pressure of a suit in Chancery the novel was re-named '*Her Splendid Misery*;' but as this alteration did not satisfy the Court of Chancery, the title was again changed into '*Her Gilded Cage*.' The new title was adopted by Mr. Edmund Yates, Proprietor and Editor of the *World*, to avert the risk of inadequately complying with an injunction which had issued against the continued use of the words 'Splendid Misery.' It is to be hoped that the promised revision of the Law of Copyright will contain clauses to protect authors against the oppressive surprise of a Chancery suit over a forgotten or a disused title, and that some inexpensive court will be empowered to deal, promptly and cheaply, with such insignificant contentions. As matters now stand, the Author feels constrained to give prominence to the name of her heroine in the title of her book, which she accordingly sends forth as

THE STORY OF BARBARA;

HER SPLENDID MISERY, AND HER GILDED CAGE,

in the belief that no one can take exception either to a mere Christian name, when used in the title of a novel, or to the trebly distinctive title now given to a book that was written to amuse the public, and not to exercise the copyright lawyers.

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BARBARA

CHAPTER I.

A FAMILY PICTURE.

“**HAVING** a house larger than they require”—you must say that, mother,’ said Bab, sitting on the floor, with clasped hands resting on her knees, and her knees on a level with the prettiest chin in Camberwell. ‘It’s the correct thing.’

‘Only sixty words allowed for five shillings,’ said Mrs. Trevornock, looking up distractedly from an original composition, which she was inditing with the assistance of her two daughters.

‘But you really ought to put it, mother,’ cried Flossie, on her knees beside the table. ‘It’s the only thing that takes off the edge of one’s humiliation. “A lady and her daughters, having a house larger than they require, are willing—”’

“Will be happy,” suggested the mother.

‘No, mother; that’s a great deal too humble,’ said Flossie. ‘That’s making oneself much too cheap. Do make it “are willing.”’

‘Very well, dear. It will be over sixty words, I’m sure. “Are willing to receive a gentleman as partial boarder.”’

‘Partial boarder!’ echoed Bab, making a wry face, but not able to make an ugly one. ‘Partial boarder! Isn’t it a horrid expression!’

“Bedroom large and airy.”’

‘Large and airy,’ repeated Flossie musingly; ‘I wonder what really constitutes a large bedroom in the idea of a person brought up, say, in Grosvenor-square.’

‘People brought up in Grosvenor-square could never sink so low as to be partial boarders,’ said Bab. ‘Don’t fritter away our time upon such idiotic remarks.’

“Bedroom large and airy,” repeated Mrs. Trevornock,

dwelling upon this statement as if it were an original idea ;
“ use of sitting-room, dinner on Sundays. Family musical.”

‘ Won’t you add that we have seen better days, mother, since you seem bent on being biographical ?’ suggested Flossie.

Mrs. Trevornock laughed good-humouredly at this pert sally. She was always ready to laugh at her daughter’s smallest jokes, and their inherent impertinence had been fostered by maternal indulgence. They were as poor as Job, this mother and her two daughters ; but as far as indulgence went, Flossie and Bab had been brought up under glass.

Yes, they were poor, absolutely poor ; not in the sense accepted by society, which means that people have fifteen hundred a year and would like to spend three thousand, or have three thousand and find life intolerable because they have not six. Mrs. Trevornock and her two daughters managed to face life upon a reliable income of something under a hundred and fifty pounds a year. They had occasional windfalls, or the problem might have proved insoluble ; but after reckoning these casual inlets of money, the total of their income rarely reached two hundred pounds a year : but this was before the Crimean war, and the cost of living was less in those days than it is now. Yet their poverty never degenerated into ugliness. The little semi-detached house at Camberwell—rent, twenty-five pounds per annum—had a dainty prettiness not always attainable by people of larger means. The mother and daughters were so fond of each other, and so fond of their home, that the whole of life was sweetened by this overflowing fountain of love. They were always trying to surprise each other, with some improvement in house or garden, were it only a shilling rose-bush planted in the border, or a penny bunch of violets in a vase on the mantelpiece. They were industrious, ingenious, temperate. They cared very little how they dined, but they cared very much about the house in which they lived. Ugliness and dirt were loathsome to them. The semi-detached cottage at Camberwell was as clean and pure as a homestead far away in a pastoral land, remote from the smoke of cities. Mrs. Trevornock’s existence was a perpetual warfare against ‘ the blacks ;’ not an oppressed negro race, but those wandering atoms of solidified smoke which came floating on the wings of the wind from the tall chimneys of Lambeth and Bermondsey.

South-lane, Camberwell, is one of those places which progress has doubtless eradicated from the face of the earth. Progress means building-land at two thousand pounds an acre, houses in serried ranks, close as a square of infantry, mere packing-cases set on end, with just as much garden to each as would serve as drying-ground for half a dozen pocket-handkerchiefs. South-lane knew nothing of progress. It had come into being at an

Arcadian period of the world's history, when land about Camberwell was of little more than agricultural value. The houses, villas, cottages, what you will, were various in architecture, and set in gardens that were extensive as compared with the gardens of to-day. The lane described a gracious curve, and made a vista of greenery as seen from either end. Trees grew and flourished—hawthorn and lilac, lime and sycamore, sweet bay and Portugal laurel. There were good tenants and bad, gardens neatly kept and gardens neglected, but the general effect was prettiness and rusticity.

The advertisement appeared in the *Times*, and about three days after its publication—days spent by Mrs. Trevornock and her daughters in a flutter of expectation—a partial boarder—one only—addressed himself to the advertiser, who had discreetly veiled her identity under initials, letters to be addressed to 'F. T.,' 20 South-lane, Camberwell.

'One letter, only one poor little letter!' cried Bab, running in from the hall, where the letters fell through a slit in the door on to the floor-cloth. 'But it looks rather aristocratic.'

Mrs. Trevornock broke the seal with a nervous hand, while the two girls pressed round her as if their most vital interests were at stake.

The letter had a gentlemanlike appearance, sealed with a neat crest, written on thick creamy paper in a firm hand.

'Mother,' cried Flossie, pointing excitedly, 'look at the address! It must be from some one of consequence.'

'East India United Service Club.' Those were the mystic words which had excited Flossie. To her simple mind a man who belonged to a club must needs be a superior order of being.

'O mother,' she exclaimed dolefully, while her bright blue eyes made a circuit of the little room, 'we shall never be good enough for him. I'm afraid we made the advertisement too attractive. I daresay he will expect to find us in a mansion.'

'As if people in mansions ever wanted partial boarders!' cried Bab, with a practical air. 'Every one knows that a partial boarder is a genteel contrivance meant to eke out a small income.'

Mrs. Trevornock read the letter aloud deliberately. They had all three devoured it with their eyes the moment it was opened.

'Captain Leland' ('O, what a pretty name!' cried Flossie) 'presents his compliments to F. T., and will be glad of an interview at F. T.'s earliest convenience.—East India United Service Club, St. James's-square, Tuesday morning.'

'He doesn't say that he'll come,' said Flossie.

'Of course not,' retorted Bab. 'He'll come and look at us—'

'Don't say us,' remonstrated Flossie. 'I shall not be in the room when he calls.'

'Nor I, of course. I mean that he will come and survey mother, and the house, and the neighbourhood, and our maid-of-all-work, and the large airy bedroom; and if he doesn't think it all worth a guinea a week, with dinner on Sundays, he will not take up his residence with us. I wonder whether he'll ask you what kind of Sunday dinners you mean to give him, mother—whether you have your joints roasted or send them to the bakehouse. I daresay a club-man would object to the bakehouse.'

'Not if he were very hungry and met a shoulder of mutton coming home on the top of a batter-pudding,' said Flossie, with conviction.

'I suppose we shall have to dine late on Sundays, and become quite fashionable in our habits,' said Bab. 'Come, mother darling, take your nicest sheet of paper, and write a pretty note to Captain Leland. I daresay his name is the best part of him.'

'Perhaps he is old and ugly,' suggested Flossie, her enthusiasm suddenly evaporating.

'He must be poor,' said Bab. 'No one who wasn't poor would offer himself as a partial boarder—to get his breakfast in one place, and his dinner in another—cutting himself in half, as it were.'

'An excellent arrangement for a club-man,' replied Mrs. Trevornock, who was inclined to take a cheerful view of the question. 'Of course he will always dine at his club.'

'On the days when he does dine,' said Flossie. 'Perhaps he will contrive to skip his dinner sometimes, and revenge himself upon our tea. That will be dreadful.'

Mrs. Trevornock answered Captain Leland's note, appointing the following afternoon at three o'clock for the interview, 'if quite convenient to Captain Leland,' she added politely.

The two girls went out together to post the letter, and to make various small purchases of household stores in the Camberwell road. They performed this domestic duty daily, thereby saving time for the one servant, a healthy round-faced Devonshire girl, answering to the name of Amelia, who, with Mrs. Trevornock's supervision, and a good deal of actual help from the same lady, contrived to keep the house in immaculate order, a bright example to neighbouring householders.

The girls talked about Captain Leland all the way to the post-office. Their lives travelled in such a narrow circle that the smallest incident became a subject for inexhaustible talk. They read a good deal, and were by no means unintelligent or shallow; but they could not always talk about books. There was an impetuous humanity in them which made it necessary to them now and then to be interested in people. Their acquaint-

ances might be numbered on their fingers, and the people they knew were not brilliant. Indeed they might fairly have come under Carlyle's sweeping category : they were 'mostly fools.' A mother and two daughters living upon something less than two hundred a year were not in a position to cultivate a large circle of friends, or to find their society in eager request among the salt of the earth. If Mrs. Trevornock and her two girls were invited to a tea-party once in six weeks, or to a friendly dinner once a quarter, they considered themselves fairly favoured by the attention of their friends. There were occasional droppings-in, casual tea-drinkings, which enlivened the interval between such deliberate invitations ; so that life was not altogether dreary.

'I feel sure he is old and ugly,' said Flossie, for about the twentieth time, as they crossed Addington-square.

'Don't be so dreary,' remonstrated Bab. 'Let us amuse ourselves by making the wildest images of him for the next four-and-twenty hours. To-morrow at three o'clock we shall know the worst ; for of course we shall contrive to see him, though he won't be allowed to see us.'

'Naturally.'

'Let us imagine him like Rochester in *Jane Eyre*.'

'Dark as Erebus, and with a heavy under-jaw ; making the rudest speeches for the first week or so, and then falling desperately in love with one of us,' said Flossie, in a rush of eager words. 'Of course it would be you, Bab.'

'Why should it be ?'

'Because you are ever so much prettier than I am.'

'Am I, Flossie ? Then I think I ought to be very conceited, for you're the prettiest girl I know.'

'You know so few girls,' said Flossie deprecatingly, and blushing all over her face, even at a sister's compliment.

Flossie was not unworthy of praise, though she was right when she described her sister as the prettier. They might be called the positive and the comparative degrees of beauty. Flossie's eyes were blue and bright ; Flossie's hair was auburn with golden gleams in it ; Flossie's figure was graceful in outline. But there was that in Barbara's face which belonged to a higher kind of beauty. Barbara's eyes were darkest gray, with long black lashes. Barbara had the white-rose complexion, pure, almost colourless, which is of all beauties the rarest. People who passed the two girls in the street were apt to think Flossie the prettier. Her brilliant complexion and bright hair caught the eye.

The letter was posted, the shopping was done, the four-and-twenty hours of doubt and expectancy were lived through somehow ; and at three o'clock on the following afternoon Bab and

Flossie were hiding themselves behind the chintz curtain of an up-stairs window, watching for 'Rochester.'

The clock of the church by the canal struck the hour, and the last stroke had hardly died away when the girls saw the top of a hat above the Portugal laurels of the next-door garden.

'He must be an old fogey, or he would never be so punctual,' said Flossie, with a disgusted air.

'Rochester was never punctual in his life,' said Bab, also disgusted.

The stranger was at the gate by this time, a white five-barred gate, which swung back easily as he pushed it.

'He is quite young!' cried Bab.

'Dark!'

'Tall!'

'Good-looking!'

'With a moustache!'

A moustache was a rare adornment in those days. It might be taken to mean one of three things—a cavalry officer, a foreigner, or a swindler.

'I hope he's respectable,' said Bab doubtfully.

'He's very good-looking,' said Flossie.

The stranger came along the gravel walk; it was a semi-circular sweep, which Mrs. Trevornock talked of complacently as a carriage-drive. A very clever coachman might have succeeded in turning a one-horse chaise within that gravelled area without absolute destruction to the vehicle or the parlour-window; but for prudential reasons, vehicles were mostly pulled up outside the gate.

Little did the partial boarder wot of those four bright eyes concentrating all their seeing power upon the top of his hat as he knocked a resolute double-knock at Mrs. Trevornock's door. He was contemplating the house and its surroundings, pleased with the rural quiet of the scene, the blossoming hawthorns, golden laburnum, and all the flowers of the sweet May time. The exterior view of the house suggested comfort, and even a modest elegance.

'It would be better than living in a smoky London street,' Captain Leland said to himself, 'and it would be cheaper into the bargain. The walk from here to the clubs would not hurt my long legs.'

The little maid-of-all-work opened the door, neat and trim in her afternoon gown and smart cap. Servants wore caps in the days before the Crimean war. Breathing hard, as in some terrible strait, the maiden ushered the stranger into the drawing-room, where Mrs. Trevornock, who had seated herself just three minutes before, flushed after a hasty toilet, rose to receive him.

What did Captain Leland see in the little drawing-room,

fifteen feet by twelve and a half, lighted by one wide French window, looking out upon the semicircular grass-plot girdled with shrubs? He saw a woman who was evidently a lady. He saw a room which assuredly belonged to ladies. The sweet face, a little faded, but still very sweet, which greeted him with an engaging smile, pleased him at once. The room pleased him as well as its mistress. The old-fashioned furniture was well worn, but not shabby. The open piano and book-shelves, the spring flowers and modest array of old china, suggested tastefulness and love of home. Captain Leland had been at large in the wide world long enough to reverence even the abstract idea of home—how much more the reality!

The first few questions and answers were embarrassing. The gentleman stammered, and traced the pattern of the carpet with the ferule of his cane, the lady replied hesitatingly. This kind of barter was new to both of them. But when the sordid question of terms had been settled, they gradually grew more at ease, and then came a burst of frankness from the Captain.

‘I am sure I shall like to live here,’ he said pleasantly: ‘I am home on leave from India, and as all my people are in the depths of the country, I have been living in West-end lodgings, and spending most of my time at my club. I have been far from comfortable. West-end lodgings are always dear, and sometimes dirty. Mine are decidedly dirty. A club is an immense convenience to a single man; but one may have too much of it.’

‘I am afraid you will find this rather dull after the West-end,’ said Mrs. Trevornock.

‘Not I. West-end gaiety for me only means the noise of perpetual carriage-wheels, and footmen knocking double-knocks. I know very few people in London, and don’t care much about visiting those I do know.’

Mrs. Trevornock looked at the Captain wonderingly, as if this admission of his savoured of eccentricity. A military man, young, good-looking, ought to be in the very maelstrom of society, she considered. He should be in request at the drums of duchesses, admitted to the receptions of Cabinet Ministers. She began to fear there might be something wrong about Captain Leland.

‘O, by the way, with regard to references,’ said the Captain, almost as if he divined her doubts. ‘There was something in your advertisement about references, I remember. I can refer you to my banker. He will be happy to answer any questions. Not because he has a large balance in my favour, but because he is a very good-natured fellow,’ added Captain Leland, with that engaging frankness which had already won Mrs. Trevornock’s regard.

‘I am sure that will be all sufficient,’ she murmured, without

waiting to hear the banker's name. 'But the advertisement said references exchanged. If you would like to call upon the incumbent of St. George's—'

'Not the slightest necessity. I am a waif and stray. You have a right to ask for my credentials; but you are a householder—and a lady.'

'You would like to see the bedroom, no doubt,' said Mrs. Trevornock, trying to be business-like; and then she rang the bell, and Amelia, who had been carefully drilled in her part, escorted Captain Leland up the pretty little staircase to the 'large and airy' bedroom, overlooking half an acre of flower and vegetable garden, a canal, a stretch of open ground, and a conglomeration of roofs, melting away into the thickness of London smoke.

The two girls in the front room were in a flutter as the Captain's manly footstep came up the single flight of stairs. He spoke to the servant, and they heard his voice for the first time—a deep full voice, pleasant of sound to Bab and Flossie.

'Do you think he really means to come?' asked Bab.

'No,' answered Flossie; 'he is much too stylish. We are not good enough for him.'

'But he has been a long time talking with mother.'

'Idle curiosity,' exclaimed Flossie contemptuously. She was trying to steel herself against disappointment.

The Captain's inspection of the bedroom lasted exactly two minutes. The window opened at top and bottom, and there was a chimney, so the airiness of the chamber was beyond question. Size is a matter of degree. The Captain had seen many larger rooms, but this one looked as clean as a new pin, and he was languishing for speedy escape from West-end grime and frowiness. He went down-stairs completely satisfied.

'Ah,' cried Flossie, 'of course he'll tell poor mother that he'll take a day or two to think it over, and then he'll go away and forget all about us. I know what such people are capable of.'

They waited breathlessly for five minutes, when the hall-door shut with a bang, and then they precipitated themselves down-stairs headlong. If they had not been very young and very familiar with that staircase they must have arrived in the hall with broken necks.

'Well!' gasped both girls simultaneously.

Mrs. Trevornock tried to look serious. She would have liked to have had her little joke with them, and to have kept them on tenter-hooks for a few minutes; but her satisfaction broke out on her countenance in irrepressible radiance.

'He is coming?' cried her daughters, still simultaneous.

'Yes, he is coming,' admitted the mother; 'and he is so friendly and gentlemanlike. I am sure we shall all like him.'

'We shall have to be tremendously well-behaved,' said Flossie, becoming suddenly doubtful as to the unqualified delight of having a gentlemanlike boarder. 'I am afraid Captain Leland will put a stop to a good deal of our fun.'

'Well, of course we shall not talk quite so much nonsense as we have been in the habit of talking,' admitted Mrs. Trevornock. 'We must behave seriously when he is at home; but we can make up for it when he is away. He has his club, you know. I daresay we shall see very little of him.'

'No doubt,' said Flossie, again dubious.

The Captain had left his card. Barbara saw and pounced upon it.

'H.E.I.C.S.,' she read. 'What does that mean?'

'Honourable East India Company's Service,' said Mrs. Trevornock, proud of her superior knowledge.

'Why, then he isn't a real soldier after all!' said Flossie indignantly; whereupon her mother hastened to explain that the Honourable East India Company's Service was every whit as good as the Queen's.

'Your cousin Walter Smythe was in the Company's service, Flossie. You ought to remember.'

'I suppose I ought. But as I never saw my cousin Walter in my life, I can hardly be expected to feel deeply interested in him.'

Mrs. Trevornock assented with a gentle sigh. The Trevornocks of South-lane, Camberwell, were those social pariahs, poor relations. They belonged to a good old Cornish family, and were very proud of their ancient and eminently respectable lineage. They had uncles and cousins in both services, uncles and cousins well planted in the garden of the Church; but of all these well-placed kindred it was their destiny to see but little. The rich Trevornocks were not unkind or unfeeling. If they had been, the poor Trevornocks could hardly have gone on existing, for it was partly to periodical remittances from her well-to-do relations that Mrs. Trevornock owed her means of living. But there was a gulf. Letters were frequently exchanged. When the well-placed Trevornocks came up to town, they made a point of calling in South-lane. Mrs. Trevornock and her daughters were even asked to a family dinner. But there it ended.

Mrs. Trevornock had been a Miss O'Reilly, the portionless daughter of a popular West-end physician, Irish by birth, English by culture. The doctor lived long enough to marry his daughter to a younger son of old Mrs. Trevornock of Tregloss, near Bodmin—a young man who was beginning life brilliantly as a junior partner in a first-class firm of City solicitors—and died at peace with himself and the world just six months before young Tre-

vornock went utterly to the bad, and proved himself at once and for ever the black sheep of his highly respectable family.

'When is he coming, mother?' asked Flossie, who was the more eager of the two sisters for all things promising change and excitement.

'To-morrow.'

Bab made a wry face.

'Only one more evening of our sweet liberty,' she said. 'I wish Captain H.E.I.C.S. was at Jericho.'

'You know you don't mean it,' protested Flossie. 'You'd be wofully disappointed if he were to write and say he had changed his mind.'

'Well, perhaps I should,' admitted Bab. 'It will be rather exciting to have a real live military man in the house.'

Bab concluded by waltzing lightly round the room on the tips of her toes, almost as cleverly as a trained opera-dancer. She had practised standing on her toes many a time when she had nothing to do, and life seemed particularly flat and empty.

'Mamma,' said Flossie, 'as this is to be our last evening alone, we ought to have a scrumptious tea.'

'You mustn't say scrumptious before Captain Leland,' said Bab. 'You will have to forget all your horrid slang words.'

'Shall I? I hope he will teach me a lot of new ones. Now, mother dear, what shall we have for tea? Bloaters?'

'Bloaters!' cried Bab, with a disgusted look. 'The smell of them wouldn't be gone for a week. I vote for strawberry-jam, or one of mother's pound-cakes hot out of the oven—such a cake as you made us last Sunday, ma darling.'

Mrs. Trevornock looked down at her black-silk gown, her one really good gown, the gown she wore in society.

'I must change my gown if I am to make a cake.'

'Of course, ma. You wouldn't think of wearing that lovely dress all the evening. We shouldn't feel at home with you if you did. We should have to put on company-manners.'

Mrs. Trevornock never denied her daughters anything; so the grand gown was exchanged for every-day raiment, and they all three swarmed into the neat little kitchen—not a loathsome blackbeetle underground den, but a room looking into the garden, and all a-glitter with shining tins and coppers. Here there was much joyful chatter while the cake was being made, the noisiest beating of eggs, a wild dance with the flour-dredger, a general ebullition of high spirits on the part of both girls, and much good-humoured laughter from the light-hearted mother, who thought her children the wittiest and wisest examples of their species, as well as the loveliest and the best.

Never was a happier meal than that six-o'clock tea in the snug back parlour, opening, with one long French window, into

the old-fashioned garden, where, six-and-twenty years ago, the roses grew and thrived as they would hardly thrive in the smokier Camberwell of to-day. There were no roses yet a while. It was the middle of May, and still cold enough for an evening fire.

So the mother and daughters sat by their snug hearth, and drank strong tea and ate hot buttered cake, with a reckless disregard of possible damage to their digestive organs, and chattered to their hearts' content.

Of course they discussed Captain Leland. Mrs. Trevornock was made to describe him minutely. The impression conveyed by her description was not altogether pleasing.

'Very dark, burnt almost copper-colour,' repeated Flossie. 'Why, mamma, he must be hideous. I hope he isn't a native.'

'Of course he is,' said Bab. 'He must be a native of somewhere.'

'I mean an actual Indian. I thought his complexion looked dreadfully like the best coalscuttle as he came up the garden.'

'It's only the effect of an Indian sun.'

'Don't say that, mamma,' protested Flossie. 'As if they had a different sun in India!'

'And the black moustache carries off the darkness of his skin,' added Mrs. Trevornock.

'A moustache is heavenly, if one can only be sure it's respectable,' said Flossie.

'Mother,' said Bab, 'what will aunt Sophia say when she hears you have taken a gentleman-boarder?'

'I hardly know how to tell her,' faltered Mrs. Trevornock. 'I shall have a dreadful letter.'

'One of her lecturing letters,' said Flossie. "'My dearest Flora, how could you?'" I know them so well. She will tell you that, with two young daughters, you ought not to allow a man under ninety across your threshold; that in your position you cannot be too careful; that to take a boarder of any kind is in a manner to humiliate and degrade your family; that if you felt yourself constrained to take a boarder, you ought to have chosen an elderly Christian lady who wanted a quiet home. Yes, mother, you are in for it.'

Aunt Sophia was a maiden lady, who lived in a pretty house of her own just outside Exeter, a house with just enough land about it to be called a 'seat,' and to enable its possessor to figure respectably in Burke's *Landed Gentry*. The best society of Exeter, save in its ecclesiastical elements, was hardly good enough for Miss Trevornock of Maitlands; but she visited widely among the county families, and to her mind all that was best and loftiest and most severely proper upon earth lay within a twenty-mile radius of Maitlands. She was a good woman, according to her

lights, kindly disposed, affectionate, accomplished, with a turn for elegant literature; but she could not see beyond that twenty-mile radius. Her mind was narrowed to the limit of her own little world and its little set of inhabitants. She saw all things from their standpoint, and was always asking herself what her own particular friends would think upon any given subject. Their opinions she accepted as her law. All the great names that made the century famous were as nothing when weighed in the balance with 'county people.'

It must be supposed that such a lady would look with anxious eyes towards that unconventional household at Camberwell. She was fond of her sister-in-law, but she never knew what dear Flora might do. Flora was impulsive; Flora was imprudent; worst of all, Flora was poor; and if Flora did anything foolish or degrading, be sure the county families would hear of it. The thing would get known somehow, by one of those unlucky coincidences which we call strange, yet which seem to be the common law of daily life.

CHAPTER II.

THE PARTIAL BOARDER.

GEORGE LELAND, unconscious of the sensation he had made in the family nest, appeared in due time at the cottage in South-lane. Laburnum Cottage was the name painted on the gatepost, in unpretending white upon black. The garden looked bright and pretty in the afternoon sunshine, the modest little entrance-hall was beautified with a bowl of wallflowers and purple iris, everything looked exquisitely pure and clean—most refreshingly so to the deserter from the aristocratic tents of the West-end.

'I had no idea Camberwell was such a nice place,' said Captain Leland pleasantly, when he had shaken hands with Mrs. Trevornock. 'You positively seem in the country.'

Here he became aware of two slim figures shrinking from sight in the next room; the folding-doors between the two sitting-rooms were open, affording a spacious apartment, and giving a full view of that dear old back garden, with its wide grass-plot and background of apple-trees.

'My daughters,' murmured Mrs. Trevornock: 'Captain Leland,—Miss Trevornock, Miss Florence Trevornock.'

Hereupon came more handshaking. Flossie vowed afterwards that the Captain blushed vehemently. Perhaps he did. His bronzed check may have flushed with sudden wonderment. He had not expected to find anything so beautiful as Barbara

Trevornock within the confines of Camberwell. It would not do to stand stock-still and stare at her, like a man bereft of reason ; so he pulled himself together, and said something.

‘ You seem to have quite a large garden,’ he remarked.

‘ Yes ; it is large for a garden so near London,’ Mrs. Trevornock admitted modestly ; ‘ perhaps you would like to walk round it.’

‘ Very much ; but I’d better go and settle with the cabman first,’ said the Captain, coming back to every-day life and its responsibilities.

His portmanteaux were in the act of being carried up-stairs, and were being bumped audibly at every step. He ran out, saw that his belongings were safe, paid the man lavishly, and hurried back to the little drawing-room, where the three ladies, carefully attired in their second-best gowns, were waiting for him and wondering what he would do next.

‘ I half promised Elliot to meet him at the club at seven,’ he said to himself, with a surreptitious glance at his watch ; ‘ but I hardly feel inclined to go back to town to dine.’

They all went into the garden in the stateliest manner possible. It was a large garden for Camberwell, as Mrs. Trevornock had remarked, but scarcely large enough for stateliness. The neat gravel walks were narrow. People walking two and two were obliged to be rather near together. There was a long border full of roses, and good old-fashioned perennials—columbine and lupins, larkspur, peonies, iris. There was the square grass-plat, almost worthy to be called a lawn ; and beyond that smooth expanse of turf there came an espaliered boundary, screening a not unpicturesque kitchen-garden, where good old orchard-trees grew high above the asparagus-beds and cabbage-rows. An old brick wall divided the garden from the canal that flowed outside it. Seen from the upper windows the canal had a picturesque effect. Mrs. Trevornock, who was inclined to see the romantic as well as the humorous side of everything, said the garden and canal in spring-time reminded her of Holland. She had never been in Holland, but that country was vividly represented in her pictorial mind.

Captain Leland walked by Mrs. Trevornock’s side along the narrow pathway. Bab and Flossie strayed off arm in arm upon the grass, talking in low voices, and very much inclined to giggle.

‘ Do let us behave like young ladies, if we can,’ said Bab giving the irrepressible Flossie’s arm a ferocious grip.

‘ Barbara, you are pinching me black and blue.’

‘ I would do anything rather than let you disgrace yourself. What do you think of him ?’

‘ Divinely handsome !’ cried Flossie, always in extremes.

‘ Nonsense ! He is not bad-looking. I rather like that

bronzed complexion : one would paint him with a wash of warm sepia. The thick black moustache is picturesque, too ; in fact, the man's whole air is picturesque. Flossie, don't go and elevate him into a hero. You are so ridiculously romantic. But he really is—just a little—like Rochester. Don't you think so ?

'Not a bit,' answered Flossie decisively. 'He is a great deal better-looking. Because, you know, however one may let one's enthusiasm run away with one, if Jane's description was faithful, Edward Fairfax Rochester was a guy. It was his ways that fascinated her. There was something so delightful in his bearishness, so original in his incivility.'

Captain Leland was coming across the grass towards them, talking to their mother as he came. Yes, he was decidedly good-looking—dark hair and darker eyes ; features large and boldly cut, but regular ; a fine frank smile ; a lofty carriage of the head ; and the air of a man accustomed to command : a man essentially manly, essentially soldier-like—a soldier by vocation, not for convenience. Had those two girls, glancing at him shyly from the vine-wreathed arbour to which they had withdrawn themselves,—had Bab and Flossie known half that his brother-officers could have told them about George Leland, they would have esteemed him a far more romantic personage than Edward Rochester, at best but an unprincipled Yorkshire squire, who had made a failure of his life, and had a very low idea of a man's career or a man's duty in this world.

'I don't wonder that you are fond of your garden,' said Captain Leland. 'It is as pretty as anything I remember in Somersetshire.'

'Somersetshire !' echoed Mrs. Trevornock. 'Do you come from the West of England ?'

'Yes. My people all live in the neighbourhood of Taunton.' Mrs. Trevornock sighed.

'I know very little of Somerset,' she said. 'My husband's family belongs to Cornwall. It is a very old family. A Trevornock was member for the county in Elizabeth's first Parliament.'

She could not help feeling proud of that one glory which had been left to her in the days of her poverty. It was perhaps as well to let the partial boarder know that they were not common people. His manner was courteous and respectful ; but, in his secret soul, he might consider himself the superior.

"By Tre, Pol, and Pen you may know the Cornishmen," quoted the Captain. 'The name sounds like a good one. Were these young ladies born in Cornwall ?'

'No ; they were born in London.'

'Within the sound of Bow Bells, I'm afraid,' said Flossie, recovering her accustomed pertness as the soldier's aspect grew

familiar, though I don't remember hearing them. I suppose I wasn't listening.'

'I'll go and see about the tea,' murmured Mrs. Trevornock, whose whole life was consumed in seeing about things. 'Will you join us at our six-o'clock tea. Captain Leland, or have you any engagement in London?'

'I—I had a kind of engagement,' faltered the Captain, blushing violently: 'but I think I shall forget all about it. Yes, I shall be delighted to drink tea with you.'

Mrs. Trevornock departed, leaving the two girls and the Captain face to face. It would have been hard to decide which was the more bashful of the two, Barbara or Captain Leland. Flossie's indomitable impudence was not to be dashed so easily. She was the first to break an awkward silence.

'Is India a nice place?' she asked, with alarming abruptness.

Bab was twisting a vine-spray in and out of the lattice, looking down at her work, as intently as if her life depended upon it.

It is a magnificent country; but I don't know whether a young lady accustomed to the more refined civilisation of—

Camberwell,' interjected Flossie.

'Would consider it nice. I liked it well enough, though I had to work very hard there.'

Fighting battles?' suggested Flossie.

'Not always. That kind of work is the oasis in a desert of commonplace. In my early Indian days I had to superintend the building of a hospital; to stand about in the sun, watching the men making bricks; to show one nigger how to lay his bricks, when they were made; to explain to another the mysteries of screws and nails and hinges. And as I had never learnt the building business myself, this required more pluck than spiking a gun. Sometimes I had to turn my hand to civil engineering, and was ordered to make a forty-mile road. It was my province to make myself generally useful. I am glad to say that I came in for plenty of fighting afterwards; but I had to make my soldiers, just as I had made my bricks, and to be drill-sergeant as well as captain.'

'And did you—kill people?' asked Flossie, struggling against a look of abhorrence.

'Sometimes. If you saw a copper-coloured scoundrel, a creature scarcely human in his ferocity, rushing at you like a tiger, yelling "Wah, Gooroo, ji!" and striking at you with his tulwar, what would you do?'

'I think,' said Flossie deliberately, 'I should run away.'

'I stayed, and cut him in two. Unhappily, you see, a little bloodshed is an unavoidable element in war. There are occasions when one must either kill or be killed.'

Flossie felt as if she would hardly enjoy her tea in the society

of such a monster. A good-looking monster, decidedly. She stole a glance at him from under her golden-tipped lashes, and made up her mind that he was better-looking than the square-jowled Rochester. There was more of the hero and less of the bulldog about him.

How stupidly Bab was behaving, Flossie thought indignantly. There she stood, twiddling the vine-tendrils, and leaving the whole responsibility of the conversation to her younger sister. This was the consequence of seeing so little society. Bab, too, who was supposed to be a genius, who had steeped herself in Shakespeare and Byron, Bulwer, Thackeray, and Dickens, and who wrote verses by the yard. It was too bad!

'Is India a—large place?' Flossie inquired desperately, after a minute and a half of absolute silence.

Captain Leland smiled.

'Yes, there is a good deal of it,' he said; 'there is plenty of elbow-room for fighting. I don't want to be too geographical; but to-morrow, if you'll allow me, I'll show you some sketches of scenery and native life which I made during my travels in the land of the five rivers.'

He spoke to Flossie, but he looked at Barbara, wondering when those lovely lips would find speech. It seemed as if she understood that look of his, for she answered him.

'I should like very much to see them,' she said. 'Flossie and I are dreadfully ignorant about geography, and about a good many things. We have never been at school. Mamma has educated us, and she is so indulgent, that we have only learned just what we liked. We did not like geography.'

'If you were to ask me where Kamtschatka is, I couldn't tell you,' said Flossie. 'I've a vague idea that it's one of the cold places. As for latitude and longitude, I scarcely know what they mean; and whether the equator goes round the world, or the world goes round the equator—'

'Don't expatiate upon our ignorance, Flossie,' remonstrated Bab. 'Captain Leland will take it on trust.'

They all laughed, and after this the ice seemed to be broken, and they went for a turn round the garden, Flossie bolting surreptitiously green gooseberries as they passed the bushes. Presently came the neat little handmaid to tell them that tea was ready; and then they all went into the parlour, where Mrs. Trevornock had prepared an actual banquet. Cake and toast and thin bread-and-butter; a glass jar of marmalade; a dish of anchovies nestling in parsley; the best china; the best teapot—not silver, but a very good imitation; a snowy tablecloth; a bunch of lilies of the valley in the centre of the table; an all-pervading air of comfort, which no one knew better how to impart to commonplace things than Mrs. Trevornock.

‘If we are going to live like this always, Captain Leland will be our ruin,’ thought Flossie. ‘A guinea a week will never pay for these luxuries.’

What a merry tea-party it was! Before Captain Leland had finished his first cup, they were all as friendly as if they had known one another for years. He talked of himself freely, as if anxious to make them acquainted with his antecedents, having no one to introduce him. But not by one word did he lead them to suppose that he was in any way superior to the common run of men, or that he had done anything to distinguish himself in the profession of his choice.

He told them that his father was a country clergyman, whose parish was within seven miles of Taunton. His father and mother were both living—quiet elderly people, with several sons and daughters, and no fortune to leave to any of them.

‘We have all our own way to make in life,’ he said; ‘and so far, I am thankful to say, we have all done pretty well. My father gave us a good education, and left us to do the rest. I was educated at Shrewsbury and Addiscombe. My two brothers are in the Church. Three out of my four sisters are comfortably married. The eldest, Marian, is an old maid, and the angel in the house.’

‘Why were you not a clergyman?’ asked Flossie. ‘What put it into your head to go out to India and kill people?’

‘I hardly know, unless it was reading the life of Clive.’

‘Are you not sorry you chose such a ferocious profession?’

‘No,’ he answered, with his quiet smile; ‘I am glad.’

He told them that, after eight years’ service, he had come home on a twelvemonth’s furlough. Six months were gone. He had spent the greater part of those months in Somerset, and now he meant to buckle-to and work hard at Indian languages and Indian law; for he had already held important civil appointments, involving large authority in new districts, and the post which he was promised on his return was one that would need him to be a capable magistrate as well as a daring soldier. He made Mrs. Trevornock and her daughters laugh at his stories of native squabbles and native chicaneries.

They sat long at the snug little tea-table in the glow of the evening fire, the low sunlight fading gradually behind roofs and chimneys beautified by distance. Captain Leland, who had lunched lightly, made a formidable attack on the bread-and-butter.

‘If he always eats like this, a guinea a week will go no way,’ Flossie said to herself.

Sordid consideration, perhaps, for a pretty girl. But Barbara and Florence Trevornock had been reared upon an income so small, that only the nicest calculations made it sufficient for

their modest wants. They had been bred up with an intense horror of debt. They were the very soul of honesty, truthful, confiding, candid, without a particle of false pride. These everyday virtues Mrs. Trevornock, in the course of a desultory education, had been able to instil into her daughters' minds, not by precept or eloquent theorising, but by the sheer force of example.

After tea, they repaired to the adjoining room, where the cottage-piano stood in a recess by the fireplace. In this apartment the girls kept their books, and all the refinements of their life. Here there were flowers, the few odds and ends of old china which Mrs. Trevornock had picked up in her wanderings among brokers' shops, or saved from the wreck of former splendour—her art-gallery, consisting of about a dozen good old-fashioned engravings: a landscape or two after Constable, two or three heads by Reynolds, a pair of Hogarths, and four well-known Wilkies. Those familiar subjects, though only in black-and-white, seemed to give life and light to the walls.

Seeing the open piano, the Captain naturally asked for a little music. The two girls played an easy sonata of Mozart's written for four hands, and then Barbara and her mother sang an old Italian air together: the mother in a sweet soprano but little impaired by time; the daughter in a fine contralto, a voice worthy of higher cultivation than it had received. Captain Leland listened and admired. He had an honest love of music, and confessed by and by to the possession of a baritone voice, with which he would be happy to join in a glee or a duet, as occasion required.

He sat near the bookcase, and surveyed its contents while Bab and Flossie were playing. Shakespeare, Byron, Wordsworth, Shelley—all the old favourites; *David Copperfield*, *The Cartons*; the Waverley edition of Scott, in well-worn brown calf. Scott's novels and the poets had been among Mrs. Trevornock's wedding-presents, and alone remained to her of all the tributes that friendship had offered to Dr. O'Reilly's pretty daughter.

Captain Leland liked the look of those bookshelves. They indicated refinement without bookishness. The modern learned young lady, in her smoke-coloured spectacles, with the differential calculus at her fingers' ends, would have despised so simple a collection.

'Upon my word, I believe I have fallen on my feet,' the Captain said to himself. 'This Mrs. Trevornock is evidently a lady; and how lovely the elder girl is, and how unconscious of her beauty! What a curious thing it would be if— But no, I am a fool to think of that.'

CHAPTER III.

'WRITTEN IN STARLIGHT ON THE DARK ABOVE.'

It was midsummer, and the roses were in bloom in the Camberwell garden, cabbage-roses, creamy blush, old-fashioned moss-roses—striped red and white, and deepest damask—nothing very modern or grand in nomenclature. Mrs. Trevornock and her daughters could not afford to be rose-fanciers. They were content to cherish and make the most of the roses they had. The jasmine was in bloom on the southern wall; the lilies of the valley in the shady corner by the old fig-tree had left off flowering. Captain Leland had been living in South-lane for a month, and he was as much at home with the Trevornocks as if he had known them all his life. For a bachelor and a club-man he was wonderfully domestic. He spent his mornings in the garden, or in the garden parlour, studying Indian languages, reading the daily papers, or reading aloud to Bab and Flossie, while they stitched diligently at long strips of embroidery. He went to his club for an hour or two in the afternoon, saw other military men, read more newspapers, dined moderately, and came home at eight o'clock to drink tea with Mrs. Trevornock and her daughters. No arrangement could have suited that modest little household better. The three ladies could dine when they liked and how they liked, and very simple and economical were the dinners so eaten. They had their afternoons free. They could mend and make their clothes, go on marketing expeditions, with neat little baskets or reticules, in the Walworth-road, work in the garden, decorate their drawing-room with fresh flowers, and dust and polish and arrange and rearrange the furniture, without any fear of interruption, and be neatly and freshly dressed and ready to receive their partial boarder before the clock struck eight. It was the simplest and the happiest life possible.

'Mamma,' said Flossie one day as they sat at dinner, 'I think you must acknowledge that the Captain is an acquisition. I'm so glad I thought of the advertisement. It was my idea, you know.'

This was one of Flossie's idiosyncrasies. Any new arrangement that succeeded was always claimed as her idea. It was the only talent to which she pretended. She willingly acknowledged Barbara as her intellectual superior, but the art of striking out improvements in life she claimed as her own.

'O, come now,' cried Mrs. Trevornock, 'that's too much, Flossie! We talked of a partial boarder ages ago. It seemed a sin to have such a nice bedroom going to waste.'

'Yes, but it was my idea from the very beginning. And see

how well it has succeeded. If all partial boarders are as good as Captain Leland, partial boarding must be the high-road to fortune. I wish we had six spare bedrooms !

'You didn't think quite so well of Captain Leland the first evening, Flossie,' retorted Barbara, laughing.

'When I saw him attack our bread-and-butter ? No, I thought we should be eaten out of house and home. But how nobly he makes up for his appetite ! How generous he has been !'

'A York ham,' said Mrs. Trevornock.

'A canister of Indian tea,' said Bab.

'A dozen jars of Dundee marmalade,' said Flossie.

'Baskets of strawberries daily,' pursued Bab.

'And a small salmon last Saturday.'

'To which we are bidding a tender farewell to-day,' said Flossie, pointing to the dish, where the backbone of a fish reposed in a shallow pool of vinegar between sedgy banks of fennel.

This was a catalogue of Captain Leland's benefactions since he had been a dweller under Mrs. Trevornock's roof. Perhaps he had managed somehow to find out that, in spite of the neatness and refinement of the house and all its arrangements, in spite of the pretty dresses and happy faces of the two girls, there was not a superabundance of money at No. 20 South-lane, and these gifts may have been designed as an artful means of helping his well-born hostess.

The Trevornocks, from a long experience of life in the character of poor relations, may have been wanting in that virtue which some people call proper pride. They accepted the Captain's offerings as frankly as they were given, and admired him as the most generous of men.

'There can't be anything too good for him,' exclaimed the enthusiastic Flossie. 'Think how he fought at Moodke, and splashed about in the muddy water at Sobraon, when he was little more than a boy. He doesn't boast of his own share in the work, but I know he was a hero.'

Flossie was now as learned about Indian affairs as she had been heretofore ignorant. She was as familiar with the geography of the Punjab as if she had lived there. She fancied she could have found her way through the Bolan Pass, and would have felt quite at home at Kandahar. She knew that the Sutlej is a river, and that Sikhs are not Mahometans, and she was proud of her knowledge. She adopted quite a high and mighty tone about Indian politics ; talked of Gough and Hardinge as if she had been their brother-in-arms ; and had her own idea of the kind of man who ought to be Governor-General.

'What are you going to wear this evening ?' she asked Barbara. 'Your pink muslin ?'

'I don't want to be disagreeable, dears,' said Mrs. Trevornock; but since Captain Leland has been here you have used an enormous amount of starch.'

These young ladies starched and ironed their own muslin gowns, and would not have been ashamed to own it in the best society.

'If Captain Leland were not here you wouldn't have had that salmon,' said Flossie, pointing to the backbone; 'and think how many pounds of starch you could buy for the price of him.'

'And I'm sure you would not like to see us in crumpled gowns, mamma dear,' said Bab, nestling close to her mother.

'Indeed I wouldn't, darling; and you look lovely in that pale-pink muslin,' answered the loving parent. 'We shall get on somehow, I daresay. I don't think any girls ever had nicer dresses, and your aunt Sophia talks about sending a box before long.'

'Dear aunt Sophia!' cried Flossie, clapping her hands ecstatically: 'I love her when she sends us one of her well-filled boxes, though I don't think her taste in dress quite irreproachable.'

'Decidedly rustic,' said Bab; 'but what should we do without her?'

'The mouths of gift-horses should not be too closely scrutinised,' said Flossie, with mock solemnity; 'and we forgive aunt Sophia her bad taste and her provincial dressmaker.'

The mother and daughters lingered over their frugal dinner of pickled salmon and cold gooseberry-pie. They sat wasting their time and talking about Captain Leland. Any one who had listened to them for five minutes would have known that they were all three in love with him, that it was a desperate case of hero-worship on all sides. But Barbara was the quietest of the three. Barbara said very little.

After dinner came a sultry hour over the ironing-board, with talk and laughter and song as joyous as of birds in early spring-time, when it is still a wonder that the earth is so fair and the sun so bright; then a trip to the Walworth-road, to buy tea and sugar, and those nice crisp biscuits that set off the table; anon a digression to the Albany-road, to pay a horrid tax, a thing which wrenches seventeen-and-ninepence out of one without rhyme or reason, but which must be paid on pain of summonses and all manner of grisly horrors; then home to dress, and to make oneself look one's very prettiest against the Captain's return.

Those summer-evening tea-drinkings had grown to be quite festive. The cottage-piano had been wheeled into the garden-parlour, and after tea Mrs. Trevornock would play a waltz—the 'Elfin,' the 'Indiana,' or the 'Prima Donna'—while the

Captain waltzed alternately with Bab and Flossie on the close-cut lawn. Just half a dozen turns or so with each fair young partner, in the soft light between sun and moon. Nothing premeditated; the whole thing lasting hardly half an hour. But of all the dances Barbara Trevornock was destined to dance in the course of her life, those brief waltzes on the lawn were the most lovingly remembered. Nobody can be young twice. That first sweet freshness of girlhood, those first wild beatings of a heart surprised at its newly-awakened passion, who can know them twice over? Not Barbara Trevornock, any more than the rest of her sisters.

And to George Leland—the hardy adventurous soldier, the man who could spend ten hours in the saddle, riding through the freezing night, the blazing day, through storms of dust, and hot winds that were like the blasts from a furnace—who shall say how sweet these summer nights were to him? A year ago he had been leading a wanderer's life in a wild country, sitting alone in his tent at eventide, or with no better company than a couple of savage-looking Afghan servants; far from civilisation and the fair face of woman; away from books and music and all those things he loved only less than duty. That had ever been paramount with him. He was a man who had never spared himself—who had never shrunk from any toil, mental or physical, and who had done more hard and difficult work in the seven years of his Indian apprenticeship than many men achieve in a long lifetime.

To him, then, more than to any, rest after toil was sweet.

Half-past seven. The shopping done, the tax paid, the spotless muslin gowns put on; mother napping in the shady front parlour; Flossie practising a new waltz on the little Stodart; Barbara walking alone in the garden, along the one sheltered path by which the hazels grew wild, and over which leaned the biggest of the pear-trees—very much aslant in his trunk, as if he had outgrown his strength and gone crooked, but magnificent as to his foliage, though his fruit was of small account.

What was Bab thinking about as she walked up and down in the soft evening light, tall and slender, dressed in pale muslin, with rich brown hair coiled in a knot at the back of the lovely head, heavy eyelids drooping over dark-gray eyes, the sweet face full of serious thought? What need to ask the question? What did anybody at No. 20 South-lane think of in this June of '53 except Captain Leland? He made the whole sum of everybody's meditations. Mother had dozed off with her mind full of speculations as to when he was going to propose to Barbara; yet with a feeling that, admirable as he was, he was still unworthy of so rich a prize, not being duke or marquis or millionaire. Flossie was giving only a corner of her

mind to the accidentals in her new waltz ; the greater part was occupied by Captain Leland.

A step upon the gravel, the firm tread Barbara knows so well, and in the next minute the subject of her thoughts is by her side.

'What a comfort to return to this nice old garden after the glare and dust and bustle of London streets !' said the Captain.

'Have you been very busy to-day ?'

'Very. I have seen my agent.'

'O,' said Bab, with a curious sinking at her heart, as if a cold chill had suddenly come over the warm gladness of life's atmosphere.

'Yes ; and I have settled when I am to go back.'

'To India ?' faltered Barbara.

'To India. I am to sail in the *Hesper*, which leaves Southampton on the 4th of September. I go overland, of course.'

'So soon ?'

'Do you call that soon ? I have two long months' rest and holiday yet.'

'And when you go back,' began Barbara, steadying her voice with an effort, 'do you think there will be any more war ?'

'Yes, I anticipate a few more skirmishes. Affairs in the Punjab are by no means settled.'

'And I suppose you will be going to Somerset for part of the time ?' said Barbara, after a pause.

'O, I shall run down for a week, towards the last, to see the dear old mother. But that will be quite at the end of my time probably. She likes to see the very last of me.'

'How unhappy she must feel about you sometimes, when you are so far away, and exposed to such perils !'

'I hope she does not look too much at the perilous side of my career. She is glad to think I am doing my duty and serving my country.'

'Ah,' sighed Barbara, 'I suppose that is the proper way of thinking. But if I had a son far away in a strange country, fighting with a savage people, I should be miserable.'

They walked a little longer in the garden, looking at the roses, and gathering a few of the finest for the adornment of the tea-table ; but Barbara was somewhat silent. She was considering the brevity of human happiness. Here was this new friend, who had already woven himself into the very fabric of their lives, whose presence had given life and colour to a hitherto monotonous existence, and in two little months he would go away—across the wide unknown seas and sandy desert plains—and forget them ; he would be leading his wild adventurous life, a life too full of action to leave room for thought ; he would be building and road-making, taking forts and training native soldiers

riding over hill and dale, through swamp and jungle, reckless of danger, and happy ; and it would be as if they had never known and cared for him, as if he had never known and cared for them.

‘ If he can speak so lightly about leaving his mother, he cannot care a straw about leaving us,’ mused Barbara.

CHAPTER IV.

FAMILY SECRETS.

NEXT day was rainy—quite a shameful day for the end of June, Flossie remarked indignantly ; so the Captain, who did not seem in the least indignant at the aggravating state of the weather, spent his morning with the two young ladies, selecting all the interesting bits in the *Times* to read aloud to them, while Barbara worked diligently at a strip of cambric embroidery. Flossie idled, and relieved her oppressed spirits with occasional prances round the room, like a spirited horse amusing himself in a loose box.

The only kind of needlework Flossie cared for was the alteration and reconstruction of her gowns, mantles, tippets, and furbelows. Of that occupation she never tired ; but it was an untidy species of work, which could only be done in strict retirement, and Flossie’s mind was to-day sorely exercised by a sense of divided duty.

She would like to have been in her own room, adapting her last year’s muslin to the latest fashion of this year, but she felt that she ought to stay down-stairs and play propriety for Barbara. She liked the Captain’s society also, and was just a little in love with him on her own account ; not enough to make her uncomfortably jealous or unkindly disposed to her sister, but so much as sufficed to give a zest to his society. They talked a great deal when all the not absolutely dryasdust paragraphs in the *Times* had been exhausted : they talked of India ; they talked of England ; of the past, the present, the future ; and by and by the two girls began to talk of their own history. They told the Captain how long they had occupied the little house in South-lane ; how they had discovered the spot by accident ; how the garden was a perfect wilderness, the house both outside and inside deplorably in want of paint ; and how by degrees they had made house and garden what they now were.

‘ It has been up-hill work,’ said Flossie ; ‘ I am not ashamed to tell you that I have done a good deal of whitewashing and painting myself. You’d hardly know me, I believe, if you were to see me standing on a hassock, on a kitchen-table, with my

head tied up in a handkerchief, whitewashing a ceiling. It's very exciting work,' added the damsel, 'but not altogether pleasant, for the whitewash *will* drop into one's eyes.'

And I suppose you have lived at Camberwell ever since you lost your father, said the Captain presently, after they had exhausted the subject of whitewash.

'Lost our father!' echoed Flossie. 'We never lost our father. The author of our being is still in existence.'

'Really!' exclaimed George Leland, with a puzzled look.

To have been living under a lady's roof for the space of six weeks, believing her a widow and her children orphans, and to have a husband and father sprung upon him in this way, was enough to disturb any man's equanimity.

I really thought your mother was a widow,' he faltered.

'Yes; mother is absurdly reserved upon the subject,' answered Flossie. 'For my own part I prefer perfect frankness. She has a husband; we have a father; but I am sorry to say that in both relations he is a decided failure.'

The subject was serious, but Captain Leland found himself smiling. Flossie's pert little face, as she stood opposite him, supporting herself against the end of the sofa, and twisting her pinchbeck watch-chain in her fingers, was provocative of anything rather than gravity.

'We might justly say we have no father,' said Bab; 'he has never done a father's duty.'

'Nonsense, Bab; don't be so hard upon the author of our being. I perfectly remember one Sunday, when I had my first frock with a pocket, papa gave me sixpence to put in that pocket. And he used to call me his little maid. I think those were two nice traits in his character, at any rate.'

'It would have been nicer of him if he had paid his debts, and kept a roof over our heads, instead of squandering his money,' said Bab, with a touch of bitterness.

What kind of man was—is your father?' asked Captain Leland.

'I'll describe him as I have often heard him described—in five words, "nobody's enemy but his own,"' answered Barbara.

'O!' said Captain Leland, as much as to say that was a bad case.

'He is a most good-natured person,' said Flossie. 'You could hardly put him out of temper, if you tried. He will swear at you occasionally, but not savagely. He has threatened to throw me down-stairs or out of the window; but he doesn't mean it. I daresay he finds me rather trying.'

'Then you see him sometimes?'

'O yes. We are on visiting terms. Mamma seldom goes to see him, because, you see, having left him—I believe he pretended

to be dreadfully cut up about it at the time—she has a kind of delicacy about calling on him. But Bab and I sometimes favour him with a call. He is a solicitor, and has chambers in Gray's Inn. He has not been at all fortunate in his profession, poor man; but he goes on somehow, and he generally contrives to have chambers, and tin boxes japanned the colour of tortoiseshell combs, with people's names painted on them in white letters; and I believe he has a few old Cornish clients. I know I have seen the same names upon the boxes ever since I can remember.'

'How glad he must be to see you!' said Captain Leland, with conviction.

'Do you think so?' asked Flossie, with a speculative air. 'I am afraid I have rather an aggravating effect upon him sometimes, or he wouldn't threaten to throw me out of window.'

'Does he threaten to throw *you* out of the window?' asked the Captain of Barbara, who sat, with drooping eyelids, intent upon a strip of embroidery.

'O no. Bab never aggravates him. She doesn't ask him for things, as I do.'

'O,' said the Captain; 'so you ask him for things, Flossie!'

'Yes. I'll give you a little sketch of our visit, if you like. Scene, a solicitor's office: solicitor discovered writing, or trimming his nails—more often the latter. Enter Mr. Maulford, articled clerk, ushering in two young ladies, in their best bonnets, got up generally regardless of expense. We try to make a favourable impression on the author of our being, though he is a dismal failure.'

Flossie, you are getting diffuse,' said Bab; 'pray come to the point.'

'Mr. Maulford announces, "The Miss Trevornocks," and lingers in the doorway to hear as much as he can of our conversation. "O," says Mr. Trevornock, without looking up—in a general way the author of our being is not given to looking up. "It's you, is it? How do?" We greet him as effusively as circumstances permit. "How's your mother?" he asks. We reply, without entering into details as to mamma's last headache or the touch of rheumatism she had on Tuesday week. There is a pause, and then our parent asks, "Any news from the west?" We impart so much of the contents of my aunt's last letter as we think likely to interest him. He doesn't seem to listen, but I believe he hears. A second pause follows, and then I begin my attack. "Papa," I murmur meekly, "could you let us have a little money? Barbara and I are dreadfully in want of summer bonnets, and poor mamma is worried about the water-rate. Two or three sovereigns would be a great boon." On this the author flares up. He asks me if I think he can go out in the

streets and pick up money ; if I suppose he can coin or forge. I don't ; but I do suppose inwardly that he might for once in a way earn a little money. He goes on desperately for some time, but generally ends by producing a sovereign, or a sovereign and a half, perhaps. We both thank him—indeed, I go so far as to march up to him and kiss him, while this stupid Barbara sits like a statue and twiddles her parasol. Then I proceed to ask him for a little silver to pay for our cab home. Of course we never do have anything so horridly extravagant as a cab ; but it's a polite way of extorting a little more cash. Now he begins to lash himself into a dreadful passion. I am a heartless minx. I would take the coat off his back, or the teeth out of his head—as if I wanted his teeth, poor thing !—but he finally brings a few shillings out of his trouser-pocket, which rattles as if it were full of money ; and I am sure, from the careless way he carries his gold and silver, mixed up anyhow, he ought to be a millionaire. Then I ask him for a few pence to buy some buns for our lunch ; and when I have got those, I ask for a little stationery—a quire or so of foolscap, and some sealing-wax, and quill pens—and then he says he feels strongly tempted to throw me—I am afraid he says “chuck” me—out of the window, or to fling me down-stairs. But after that I change the conversation, and before we leave him he gets quite friendly.'

'A curious state of things,' said the Captain, with a tender little look at Barbara, as who should say, 'Sweet flower, not for you should fortune's wind blow so roughly.' 'May I ask if these filial visits are frequent?'

'No,' said Flossie ; 'if they were we should be rich. We just contrive to make our parent provide our bonnets and pay the water-rate. We have seldom risen above that.'

'His portion of domestic responsibility is not heavy. May I ask how long your mother and Mr. Trevornock have lived apart?'

'You may ask anything,' replied Flossie ; 'I am candour itself. Besides, you have been so kind and friendly—salmon, ham, strawberries, Dundee marmalade,' she repeated inwardly—'that I am sure we ought to have no secrets from you. Ma left pa when Bab and I were little. They had no vulgar quarrels, you know ; but he never gave her any money for the house-keeping bills, or the servants' wages, or anything, and there was usually an execution in the house. Perhaps you don't know what that means?'

'Yes, I have an idea of the process.'

'Taxes meant one succession of summonses,' pursued Flossie. 'Of course I was not old enough to know anything about it then. We always had dinner, and I had no idea that we were on the brink of starvation. But the debt and the executions and the

worry were killing poor ma. She is honest by nature, poor dear, and she could hardly breathe in an atmosphere of dishonesty. Pa used to go to his club, and to races and gambling-houses, and enjoy himself, leaving his clerks without their salaries. The clerks used to come to ma—we lived over papa's offices in those days—and ask her for money on a Saturday afternoon, when pa had made himself scarce. It was dreadfully trying, and at last ma felt she could not bear it any longer; so one day she packed her boxes, wrote pa a polite note, and came away with us in a cab to some lodgings in the Old Kent-road, which had been taken for her by her old nurse, a faithful old hanger-on, who used to come to tea occasionally. We were quite little in those days. Bab had chubby legs. Don't blush, Bab; you could hardly have existed without legs of some kind, and there's no harm in saying they were chubby. And ma has toiled, and striven, and thought for us ever since, and educated us, and dressed us, and made us supremely happy; and if we did not love her—which we do, thank God—we should be hard-hearted little wretches. And now you know the history of our pa.'

'It is very good of you to give me your confidence,' said the Captain.

'No, it isn't. I rather enjoy talking of him. And on a wet day like this—there ought to be a law against wet days in summer—one must talk about something.'

'Would you like to go to a picture-gallery?' asked the Captain, thinking that if he could get the two girls into a gallery he might have this silent Barbara all to himself, while Flossie stuck her impertinent little nose into the pictures, which was her way of looking at art. She said she wanted to find out how it was done, having proclivities towards pen-and-ink caricature, and thinking herself an artist on the strength thereof.

'No,' said Flossie resolutely. 'That would mean no end of money spent upon cabs. I know what an extravagant creature you are. No, we will all stop at home.'

'Captain Leland may be going to his club,' remonstrated Barbara.

'If he wants to go to his club he can say so,' retorted Flossie, who had taken the Captain under her protection, and talked of him and to him as if she were his mother. 'He has the power of speech as well as I. I was about to observe that we would all stop at home, and Captain Leland should tell us about the Sikh war.'

'Nonsense, Flossie; I'm sure you must be tired of the Sikhs.'

'Does that mean that you want to be off to your club?' asked Flossie.

'Not at all. It is not a tempting afternoon for the West-end.'

'You would just as soon sit here and contemplate our dripping garden, and tell us about the Sikhs. Or perhaps you would like to give Bab a lesson in Hindostanee; though how she can feel any interest in a ridiculous language in which there is no verb "to have" is more than I can understand,' added Flossie contemptuously.

The Captain had been teaching Barbara Hindostanee during the last six weeks, chiefly for the amusement of the thing, though Flossie insisted that if ever Barbara went out as a governess it would be a great advantage for her to know Hindostanee.

'I should like it of all things,' said Captain Leland; so the grammar and vocabulary and childish little reading-book were brought out, and presently Barbara was absorbed in an exercise upon the verb "to go," while the two heads bent side by side over the books, the Captain explaining and expounding, and, indeed, doing the greater part of the work. They were as happy as children at play, and almost as innocent. It was only Flossie who was wise, only Flossie who could see the other side of the cards. That far-seeing damsel sat scribbling pen-and-ink pictures upon a sheet of the solicitor's foolscap paper, and feeling as if she was making her sister's fortune.

'She couldn't have half so much of his society if I were not always by to play propriety,' reasoned Flossie. 'Poor ma is so absorbed in the house that it is almost as if she had no existence between breakfast and tea. I am really a most valuable young person, and ought to be handsomely rewarded by and by, when our partial boarder is a general, and he and Bab have a house in Portman-square.'

The long summer afternoon was not one minute too long for the Captain and Barbara, though Flossie had to stifle more than one yawn, and grew desperately weary of watching the perambulations of a neighbour's favourite tabby on the top of the garden-wall. The roses were all dripping. The grass looked sodden. The distant roofs and steeples were dark blotches upon the universal gray. For anybody except lovers the day was chilly and depressing; but for those two yonder, bending over the grammar and exercise-book, it was as if they sat in a sunlit garden made musical by a choir of nightingales. And yet this happy idler, dawdling away the afternoon in pretended studies, was the same man who among his brother-soldiers had been famous for reckless daring—who joyed in the life of camps and revelled in the clang of arms—whose music was the trumpet-call, and the battlefield his ballroom. Love had tamed the lion. Love had brought this modern Hercules to the feet of this gentle Omphale.

'I wish ma would let us have a fire at tea-time!' exclaimed Flossie, shivering; 'and, O, I hope she has made us a hot cake

for tea! I'm half frozen, and quite ravenous. And to think that we are on the brink of July!

Tea and the hot cake came at last, with Mrs. Trevornock, who looked brisk and smiling, having made a careful toilet, after a day of household grubbing such as her soul delighted in. When tea was over there came music and song and much talk; and the evening growing fine, with a big round moon that shed glory over all Camberwell, the Captain and the two girls took a walk in the wet glistening garden.

'I've a proposition to make,' said Captain Leland, throwing aside his cigar, which he was permitted to smoke during these moonlit promenades.

'Gracious,' thought Flossie, 'he is going to propose to Bab in my presence! How hideously unromantic!'

'I know to-morrow will be a glorious day. Let us all go to Greenwich, and see the Nelson gallery, and stroll about the Park, and wind up with a whitebait dinner. The fish will be as big as herrings by this time, but that doesn't matter.'

'I agree to it all,' said Flossie, 'except the whitebait. Why go and squander money on dinner?' she demanded contemptuously. 'It is only you gluttonous men who can reconcile yourselves to spending sovereigns on a single dinner. We none of us care a straw about whitebait. Let us have our day at Greenwich, and come back to one of ma's meat-teas. A nice leg of lamb and a salad, for instance.'

'That sounds tempting,' said the Captain, whose exchequer was not so deep that he should desire to waste money on Greenwich dinners; 'and if your mother and you would really like it as well—'

'Millions of times better,' answered Flossie; and Bab was of the same opinion.

So it was decided they should drive to London Bridge early next morning, and take the train to Greenwich.

CHAPTER V.

IN ARCADIA.

THREE o'clock in the afternoon of a glorious summer day, the sky almost as blue as if it were looking down upon an Italian landscape, vine-wreathed valleys and olive woods, and the distant glory of a sapphire sea. Three o'clock, and on the wood-crowned hill of Greenwich there is delicious shade under old trees, whose topmost boughs are faintly stirred by the soft west wind.

The Captain and his party have done the Hospital and the

Neison gallery, the chapel and all the splendours thereof, which are of a somewhat chilly order. They have thrilled at the sight of the hero's coat; they have looked at the sad grand picture of his death with eyes full of tears. They have talked to divers old gentlemen of the Tom Bowling type, who had fought their battles in days gone by, and are more or less glorified by scars or lopped limbs. They have eaten strawberry-ices and sponge-cakes—Flossie indulging to a perilous extent—at the little pastrycook's in Greenwich town; and now here they are amidst the greenery of the good old Elizabethan Park, quite deserted by holiday folks to-day, and as lonely as if it belonged to the deer and the rabbits. Up on One Tree Hill yonder there are some ancient gentlemen with spy-glasses and decanter-stoppers, lying in wait for the sixpences of the idle; but here by the warren all is stillness and sweet summer silence, which means the low scarce-audible hum of Nature's myriad voices.

The Captain and Bab strolled on a little way ahead, while Mrs. Trevornock, who was beginning to feel unconscionably sleepy, sauntered with Flossie in the rear.

'How you do crawl, mother!' exclaimed that lively young person. 'I don't believe we are walking at the rate of half a mile an hour.'

'Why should we hurry, dear? We have had a long day already. The picture-gallery was rather tiring. I would give the world for a cup of tea.'

'If you had the world to give you couldn't get tea up here,' said Flossie. 'Nothing but lukewarm ginger-beer and flabby oranges, the refuse of last Christmas, and choky seedy biscuits. How can holiday people be so foolish as to eat such things, and encourage the impostors who sell them!'

'My dear, holiday people will eat anything.'

'Yes, I believe it's characteristic of the race; they are like pigs and ducks.'

'You had better sit down, mother,' said Flossie presently, when Barbara and the Captain were almost out of sight; 'you are looking wofully fagged. I'm afraid you tired yourself before we started, poor dear.'

'I only rubbed out your two muslin gowns.'

'O ma, doesn't it seem hard that a Trevornock should have to stand at the washtub!'

'I don't know that it's harder for a Trevornock than a Jones,' returned the mother plaintively; 'but when I lived with my father in Harley-street, I never thought I should have to do such a thing.'

'To think of your living in Harley-street! I never remember passing through it but once, and then the dignity of the houses from my veins. I kept saying to myself, "My ma lived

here. She had the privilege of stepping out **upon** one of those noble balconies, of knocking double-knocks with those delightful knockers. She looked out of those shining windows when she was young and pretty " I don't mean that you're not pretty now, darling,' pursued the girl eagerly; 'you're the prettiest person I know, ma, after Barbara.'

'My love, at forty one has given up thinking about one's looks.'

'You have, dearest, and that's one of the reasons why you are so pretty.'

Mrs. Trevornock breathed a regretful sigh, remembering how very little of this world's gear or this world's joys her beauty had brought her. She looked along the green vista, where the figures of the Captain and his companion were growing smaller in the distance, and sighed again as she reflected that perhaps even Barbara's fair face was to win no exalted prize in life's lottery.

'I have had so much of poverty in my time, that I should like my daughters to be rich,' she said musingly, rather to herself than to Flossie.

The girl's quick wit interpreted her thoughts.

'It's a pity that Indian officers are not better paid,' she said; 'but they say their widows are particularly well provided for.'

'My dear, an officer's widow's pension at best is but a pittance. If beauty were worth anything in this world, Barbara ought to marry a duke.'

'There are so few dukes,' retorted Flossie; 'one could count them on one's fingers. And most of those I know anything about,' she pursued, with a delightful air of familiarity, 'are old and frumpy and married already. Captain Leland is very nice.'

'He is all that is kind and good,' said Mrs. Trevornock warmly. 'I would not undervalue him for the world. But I had hoped for something so grand for Barbara.'

'But, mother, where did you expect it, or him, to come from? Who is to know that a lovely girl is waiting to be wooed and married in South-lane, Camberwell? We don't live in a fairy tale. If Barbara were to burst out as a prima donna or a great tragic actress, it would be different; but a portionless girl with a pretty face is like a flower in a cottage-garden—she may bud and blossom, and fade and wither, and the world may know nothing of her existence. Think of all the fair sweet things that live and die in the forests—the primroses and violets, the butterflies, those young fawns which are the very perfection of beauty. Nobody cares about them or knows of them. I think Barbara ought to be very proud of having captured a tall handsome Indian officer.'

'She ought to make a better match,' argued Mrs. Trevornock.

‘What could be better than a man who is so good to us?’

‘If she were engaged to him to-morrow,’ continued Mrs. Trevornock, ‘I should set my face against their being married for years to come. I could not part with my darling. It would break my heart if he were to take her to India—yet awhile.’

‘Years to come sounds a long while,’ said Flossie; ‘but I don’t think Captain Leland will be in a desperate hurry to marry. I heard him say that he was not rich enough to keep a wife. He is rich compared with us, of course, for he has plenty of money for gloves and cabs and luxuries of that kind; but I daresay he has grand ideas of how a wife should be kept. He would not expect her to iron her own muslin frocks, for instance. Besides, in such a climate as India ironing would be doubly horrible.’

‘I like him very much,’ mused Mrs. Trevornock; ‘but it would almost break my heart if she were to marry a man who must ultimately take her to India.’

While the mother was dolefully forecasting the future, proud of her daughter’s conquest, yet fearful of its result, George Leland and Barbara Trevornock were sauntering on through sunlight and shadow, as happy in the present, as careless of the future, as if they had been children straying through the woodlands of fairy tales, where, though there are ogres and wicked witches to menace and affright, there are always good fairies ready to appear in the nick of time and make all things bright and pleasant. They had been talking of indifferent matters—the hospital, the park, anything; yet they were so happy in each other’s companionship that the commonest theme seemed full of interest. Gradually their talk took a personal tone.

‘What a good woman your mother is, Barbara!’ said the Captain.

He had taken to calling her Barbara on rare occasions when they were alone together. Flossie he always called by her pet name, just as coolly as he would have called a favourite dog Gip or Flo.

‘Yes, she is all that is good.’

‘I have respected and honoured her ever so much more since you confided your family history to me. I honour her for having fought the battle of life so bravely, for having brought up her daughters so sweetly.’

‘She has fed and clothed us with love,’ said Bab tenderly. ‘No girls ever had a happier home; no girls ever had a dearer mother. Money is not everything in life. Perhaps if we had been richer we should not have been so happy, for we might not have been so fond of each other. The pomps and vanities of this world might have distracted us. It is easy enough to re-

nounce them in one's Catechism, when they are never likely to come in one's way ; but I daresay the pomps and vanities are rather enticing to people who can afford to indulge in them.'

'You have known what it is to be poor, Barbara, and you have not found that poverty must needs mean unhappiness.'

'Indeed I have not.'

'Then you would not be afraid to marry a poor man if you loved him ?' said Captain Leland earnestly.

The attack was desperately sudden. Barbara turned white and then red.

'Darling, you know what I want to say to you. You know—you must have known ever so long ago—how fondly and truly and entirely I love you.'

He put his arm round her, and her blushing face found a shelter on his breast. There was no one to see them but the rabbits, and the does, lying in the sunshine yonder, with their fawns, looking at the lovers gravely with calm contemplative eyes, as solemn and as wise as the gaze of benignant Nature.

'I thought—I began to hope,' faltered Barbara, in tones so low that he was obliged to bend his head close to her dark hair to listen, 'that you cared for me—a little.'

'Hypocrite ! you knew that I loved you to distraction.'

'Indeed, I did not. Or if I ever thought for a moment that you really loved me, I told myself afterwards that it might be only a passing fancy. I remembered those lines of Byron's you read us one night, out of the poem which is not in mother's edition,—

"Man's love is of man's life a thing apart
Tis woman's whole existence,"—

and I thought, though you were very kind and very attentive, and seemed pleased to be with us all, you would go away and forget us.'

'Like unto a man beholding his natural face in a glass ; for he beholdeth himself, and goeth his way and straightway forgetteth what manner of man he is,' quoted the Captain, laughing at her. 'When looking-glasses are so rare that I can forget my own physiognomy, I may begin to forget you, Barbara—you and yours. I love you so dearly, that if your mother were not half so sweet as she is, if Flossie were not the pleasantest little puss in creation, I think I should love them both, all the same, out of my overflowing fondness for you.'

'What made you care for me ?' asked Barbara, moved by her exceeding curiosity to look up, with eyes exaggerated by wonder.

'How could a man help caring for the loveliest thing in creation, and the gentlest, most modest, truest, divinest of her

species? I love you because you are altogether lovable. Make me happy, my angel, and confess that you are not quite indifferent to me.'

'I hope you won't be dreadfully shocked,' said Barbara, looking intensely ashamed of herself, 'but I'm afraid I adored you after I had known you a week. You see, you were almost the first man Flossie and I had ever known, so you must not be surprised if we thought a good deal of you.'

'True,' said the Captain, somewhat crestfallen. 'My position was almost as advantageous as Adam's. Then I suppose if I had been the second male individual of your acquaintance I should have had no chance?'

'You know better than that. You know that I never could have cared for any one but you.'

'I like to think so, even if it is a sweet delusion,' said the Captain passionately. 'I like to believe you are that other half of me which went astray in the beginning of things, and was only recovered when I met you.'

'It seems rather like that,' assented Barbara, with conviction. 'There must have been something fatal in it, or you would never have chosen mamma's advertisement from all the others.'

'Of course not. My eye lighted on that at once.'

'I helped to compose it,' said Bab, with a touch of pride, as if it were an honour to have assisted in that work of art.

'Yes; and I recognised your hand in it, no doubt. It was a genuine case of elective affinity.'

'Gracious!' exclaimed Bab suddenly, looking back through the leafy distance; 'I'm afraid we have lost mother and Flossie.'

'We've only mislaid them. They'll turn up presently.'

They went slowly back, telling each other, with many sweet variations upon the same old tune, how fondly and how deeply they loved. Little was said of a practical nature—of ways and means not a word. They made no plans for the future. They had not descended from the heaven of abstract love. In that empyrean they lived and had their being. To-morrow would be time enough for hard facts and the dull truths of work-a-day existence.

They found Mrs. Trevornock and Flossie on a comfortable bench under the elms: the elder lady fast asleep; Flossie yawning desperately, and digging the ferule of her parasol into the rugged bark of an unoffending tree in sheer weariness of spirit.

How lovely Barbara looked, with the new light of happiness shining in her eyes and glorifying every feature! Mrs. Trevornock awoke scared, fancying that it was morning and the milkman ringing, and Amelia not up to answer the bell. Flossie saw at a glance what had happened.

'Bab's engaged,' this astute damsel said to herself. 'She looks every inch of it.'

'Is it time to go back to the station?' Mrs. Trevornock asked sleepily.

'That is just as you ladies like,' answered the Captain, looking at his watch. 'It's half-past four; there's a train at a quarter-past five. But if you would care to stay later—'

'I could walk in this lovely old park for ever,' said Barbara.

'We ought to be back by seven,' said her mother.

So it was decided that they should stroll quietly down to the station; which they did, heroically resisting those insinuating invitations to tea and shrimps with which they were besieged on the way, and without so much as a thought of whitebait or iced champagne. There were five minutes to spare when they got to the pastrycook's, and Flossie was not proof against the offer of another strawberry-ice.

O, what a home-going it was by the smokiest railway in the environs of London, across level marsh-lands, through dingy Deptford and dingier Bermondsey! Some there were that fair June evening to whom the smoky way was a path through Paradise. Barbara sat in her corner, with the western light shaded by a purple blind, silent, happy, knowing her lover's eyes were watching her, yet never daring to look up. Flossie prattled of things in general discursively, and Mrs. Trevornock made a comfortable finish of the nap she had begun under the Greenwich elms.

What a happy evening! What a joyous meal the tea-dinner in the garden parlour, with youth and hope and love for the sauce to meat! Later a few turns in the moonlight garden to the sickly sweet 'Prima Donna' waltz. Blissful halcyon day, tender poetic night, day and night of pure and perfect happiness for Barbara Trevornock!

Next day came a dash of sadness, a sprinkle of tears. Mrs. Trevornock had to be told what had happened. She was proud of her daughter's conquest; she was honestly attached to her partial boarder; yet, having dreamed of dukes, earls, and millionaires, she had to let her ideas down a long way in order to contemplate Barbara's marriage with an Indian Captain.

He would want to take her darling to India. That was the worst part of the business. To this the mother could not consent. Her idolised girl, who had been a child only a year or two ago, obedient to her lightest word, subservient to a look, would never be so cruel as to take her fate into her own hands and declare her right to choose for herself, and snap asunder the tender tie that had bound mother and daughter through all the peaceful loving years that were gone.

Barbara wept at the sight of her mother's tears.

'No, darling, I am not going to leave you,' she said, when Mrs. Trevornock put forward her claim. 'Do you think I could be so ungrateful? You are always first in my mind. I shall always obey you.'

And then the Captain confessed that, though he would fain have made Barbara his wife without a day's delay, the present unsettled state of the country was not in favour of his taking a bride to India with him this time. He who had lived the wild life of a partisan leader, with a native regiment of his own creation, in the remote hill country, spending his days in the saddle and his nights under canvas, and who might have to lead the same hardy roving life again when he went back, was not in a position to take a delicately-nurtured girl for his companion and helpmeet yet awhile. It might be safer and wiser to wait till some more of the fighting was over, since more fighting there must inevitably be. And it would be harder to leave this dear one alone in an Indian city than to leave her here in her mother's tender care.

'It will be two or three years at most, dearest,' he said; 'and I shall have got a first-rate staff-appointment, or perhaps an assistant commissionership—I have been promised both—and then I shall be better able to give my darling pleasant surroundings. It seems a long time to wait; but I shall know that you are happy here with your dear mother, and we shall write to each other by every mail.'

This arrangement satisfied everybody. Mrs. Trevornock rejoiced at the idea of keeping her darling for three blessed years, and put aside the images of dukes, earls, and millionaires without a sigh. It was not possible for her to like anybody better than she liked George Leland; and Mrs. Trevornock's affections were very warm, if somewhat fickle. The Captain had behaved so well and kindly, he had shown so much regard for her feelings, that she could not withhold her consent; so her approval and her blessing were given. The vows vowed yesterday were ratified to-day with the maternal consent, and, in due course, Flossie was informed that her sister was George Leland's plighted wife.

'You needn't have taken the trouble to tell me anything about it,' said Flossie. 'I knew what had happened yesterday evening directly I saw your face. I never beheld such a transformation in any one in my life. You had such an air, so solemn, so self-contained, as if you were marching up the nave of some great cathedral to be crowned and anointed, and all that sort of thing. I think really I should have passed you in the street without recognising you. And after all he is neither a duke nor a railway king,' pursued Flossie. 'I don't see anything so very wonderful in the business'

'It is wonderful to me that he should care for me so much,' faltered Bab shyly, 'and that I should so idolise him.'

'Goodness gracious!' cried Flossie, rather inclined to be snappish. 'The same kind of thing might happen to me to-morrow with a grocer's boy, or the young man at the post-office. Love is a perpetual *Midsummer Night's Dream*, and we are every one of us as weak as that silly little Titania when our time comes.'

Three days after this came a letter from George Leland's mother, an honest friendly greeting to her son's promised wife.

'We shall all love you, my dear,' wrote the mother. 'I know that the girl my George has chosen must be worthy of my warmest affection.'

Mrs. Leland went on to say how, when next summer came, while George was in India, Barbara must come for a long visit to the Somersetshire vicarage, so that she might get friendly and familiar with her future sisters and brothers before her marriage. They were homely people, with no pretensions to style; but they would try to make her happy.

Barbara was as proud of the letter as if it had been written by a queen; so proud, that poor Mrs. Trevornock felt a little disposed to jealousy.

'I hope you are not going to spend half your time away from me in the few short years we are to be together,' she observed plaintively.

'Mamma darling, have I ever wished to leave you?' cried Bab, embracing her. 'I should like to know George's mother; but—'

'Of course, it's only natural. You ought to go to the vicarage; but you will be quite lost to me among these new relations.'

After this there came halcyon days for the lovers, a time when the winds were at rest, and all the hours were full of sunlight, and all the land ran over with gladness. Barbara knew herself beloved, and was no longer ashamed to show how fondly she loved again. Flossie looked on and approved, and was a sharer in all those delights natural to such a time—impromptu jaunts to Richmond or Kew, Windsor or Hampton, boat-races up the river, picture-galleries, concerts, operas—all pleasures the soldier's modest means could command. The days drifted by as gently as a shower of rose-leaves wafted on a summer breeze; and yet, through all this happy melody which filled life with music there ran one mournful minor movement that told of parting and tears.

'So soon, so soon, so soon!' sighed Barbara. Her lover was to leave her early in September.

CHAPTER VI.

MR. TREVORNOCK.

WHEN it is said of a man that he is nobody's enemy but his own, it may generally be taken as a solemn fact that the progress of that man through life has been fraught with calamity and ruin to all belonging to him. He has most likely begun by breaking his mother's heart: he has in all probability reduced a virtuous father to bankruptcy: he has robbed his sisters of their portions: he has been an incubus upon his meritorious brothers: he has brought his wife and family to the gutter: and he has degraded a good old name. Yet his own particular set speak indulgently of him to the last as a good-hearted well-meaning fellow, incapable of harming any one but himself.

Such a man was Thomas Trevornock, solicitor, of No. 2 St. Alban's-court, Gray's Inn. He was the black sheep in an otherwise spotless and unblemished flock. His family had been full of forbearance and long-suffering; they had propped him up when he lurched, and had picked him up and set him on his feet when he fell. But there was an unconquerable downward inclination in Thomas Trevornock. He had vices of which his daughters knew nothing. He had been a drunkard and a gambler. He had squandered his money amidst the lowest surroundings; he had wallowed in the gutter. He had been engaged in so many doubtful transactions that it was a marvel that he had escaped being struck off the rolls. That some few clients of seeming respectability and assured means still stuck to him was even a greater marvel.

Yet he had clients, and, although he consistently refrained from the support of wife and children, he did earn money; and for the last few years he had contrived to maintain a reputable appearance in his neatly furnished office at No. 2 St. Alban's-court, much to the satisfaction of his kindred, who told each other complacently that Thomas seemed really to be doing well, and that it was a great pity that he and poor dear Flora were not living together comfortably.

On a bright morning in early August a gentleman, who was evidently a stranger to the locality, might have been seen passing through the archway that leads into Gray's Inn—a gentleman with a bronzed complexion, dark eyes, and dark moustache, answering to the name of George Leland. He made an inquiry at the little news-shop under the archway, and having been there instructed in the way he should go, proceeded at once to St. Alban's-court, where on a second floor he discovered Mr. Trevornock's office.

The door was opened by a boy, whom Captain Leland began

to interrogate ; but before the youth could answer his question a young man looked out of a door close at hand, and took the stranger under his protection.

‘You want to see Mr. Trevornock,’ he said. ‘Have you an appointment?’

Love and antipathy at first sight are happily not common, for if they were, they would assuredly throw the quiet working of this world’s machinery out of gear. A dislike so intense as that which Captain Leland conceived for Mr. Trevornock’s articulated clerk could hardly fail to be fraught with inconvenience, if not a greater evil. The man was tolerably good-looking, well dressed, sufficiently good-mannered ; but he had those red-brown eyes and that freckled sanguine complexion which are to some minds a challenge to war. George Leland hated red eyes and a sanguine skin. The man’s mouth was thick and sensual, his teeth large, tusky, and suggestive of the lower animals. Even the unctuous curliness of his dark-red hair had an irritating effect upon the Captain, though it ought hardly to be considered a fault in a man that his hair inclines to greasy corrugations, when the grease and the curliness are alike the work of nature.

Perhaps it was the look of eager curiosity in Mr. Maulford’s red-brown eyes which was most offensive to the Captain : a hungry look which asked so plainly, ‘Is this another pigeon come to be plucked? Who and what are you, and have you brought any grist to our mill?’

‘No,’ said the Captain, ‘I have no appointment with Mr. Trevornock ; but I suppose if he is disengaged I can see him.’

Mr. Maulford appeared to hesitate, darted into the room from which he had just issued, made a show of consulting some memoranda, and darted back again, his face all alive with that eager look Captain Leland so much disliked.

‘He can give you a quarter of an hour. A rather important client from the West of England is due at twelve o’clock. What name shall I announce?’

‘Captain Leland,’ answered the soldier, wondering a little at the articulated clerk taking upon himself so humble a duty.

A glance into the room whence Mr. Maulford had emerged showed the Captain that there was no other clerk at present upon the premises. It seemed as if Mr. Maulford and the lad who had opened the door formed the full force of Mr. Trevornock’s office.

George Leland thought of Flossie as he saw the middle-aged gentleman, bald-headed, largely whiskered, sitting at his desk, busily engaged in polishing a filbert-shaped thumb-nail. He thought of Flossie as he glanced at the window, with a sudden descent from which she had been so often threatened.

‘Pray sit down,’ said Mr. Trevornock politely.

He laid aside his penknife, and waited for his visitor to explain his business, taking it for granted that the stranger was a new client. A man who wanted to borrow money, most likely, and who had heard of Mr. Trevornock as a likely person to assist him in that mysterious process known as 'doing a bill.'

'I must premise that I have not come on law business,' said the Captain, 'but on an affair of a still more delicate nature.'

'Ah,' thought Mr. Trevornock, 'exactly so; he wants to raise money.'

'For the last four months I have had the honour to be an inmate of your wife's house.'

'Indeed!' said Mr. Trevornock. 'My daughters told me their mother was going to take a boarder. A very foolish proceeding, and not likely to be profitable in the long-run. Pardon me for saying so. And so you are the gentleman who answered Mrs. Trevornock's advertisement. My younger daughter told me something about you.'

Mr. Trevornock's manner had suddenly lost its courteous blandness. He suspected his wife's lodger of some evil intention. This officious stranger had come to plague him about Mrs. Trevornock's taxes perhaps. The girls had hit upon a new way of tormenting him for money. It would be like the impertinence of that younger one—the father did not even know the younger Flora's pet name—to attempt such a thing.

'May I ask what induced you to favour me with this call, Captain Leland?' he inquired.

'I have come to you, Mr. Trevornock, to tell you that your daughter Barbara has done me the honour to accept me as her future husband. I have her mother's approval; but I thought it right that you should receive the information from my lips before I go back to India.'

'O, you are going to India!'

'Very shortly.'

'Does my daughter accompany you?'

'No. I regret to say that, in the present disturbed state of the district to which I am going, I cannot ask her to go with me. We must wait for more peaceful days. It is Mrs. Trevornock's wish that our marriage should be delayed for two or three years. I hope by that time to be in a better position to maintain a wife—as—as she ought to be maintained,' faltered the Captain, with an uncomfortable feeling that he was talking to a man who had never maintained his wife at all, and who might be sensitive upon the subject.

Mr. Trevornock accepted the position with as lofty an air as if he had been the most immaculate of fathers.

'I suppose I ought to feel honoured by this confidence, late as it comes,' he said; 'but I confess that I cannot consider the

prospect a brilliant one for my daughter Barbara, who is a girl of remarkable attractions, and might look high.'

Captain Leland wondered inwardly where the girl was to look for a loftier suitor, unless it were in threepenny omnibuses or on the Camberwell high-road.

'I am sorry to find you consider the alliance unworthy of your daughter's merits. I own that she is exceptionally lovely in person and mind. But she has lived a most secluded life. It is my happiness to be her first suitor.'

'She is very young,' said Mr. Trevornock—'too young to tie herself up in this absurd way. I don't want to offend you, Captain Leland, but I cannot give my cordial approval to an engagement which seems to me only remarkable for its imprudence. A girl of nineteen to engage herself to a gentleman who is going to India almost immediately to fight the Sikhs, who may be shot before the year is out, and who, if he live, may or may not come back to England three or four years hence to make her his wife—'

'Barbara has no more doubt of my constancy than I have of hers,' said the Captain. 'I came here, Mr. Trevornock, because I considered that it would be an ungentlemanlike act to leave England without seeing you. But knowing your past indifference to the fate of your daughters, I certainly did not expect to find you opposed to any decent alliance which either of them might please to make.'

'You are impertinent, sir,' said the solicitor, twiddling nervously with his penknife, as if that filbert nail of his still wanted some touches to arrive at perfection.

'No, Mr. Trevornock, I am only plain-spoken. I come of a good old English family—a family that never had a black sheep in it. Young as I am, my name is not unknown in the Company's service. If you are acquainted with people who know what has been doing in India during the last few years, you may ask them any questions you like about me. I am not afraid of the answer. I have the honour to wish you good-morning.'

'Good-morning, Captain Leland. I am sorry I have made myself unpleasant; but you have taken me by surprise. I had higher views for my daughter.'

'Would it not have been better to prepare her gently for the elevation for which you destined her?' asked the Captain, with quiet scorn. 'She has no idea that you ever had any views about her.'

'I am not responsible for her folly. When the proper time came I should have told her my intentions. Well, she has chosen to go her own way. I shall not interfere. I wish you all prosperity in your career, Captain Leland, and that you may be

faithful to an engagement which I can but consider hasty and ill-judged.'

'I hope the result may convince you that you are wrong, sir,' said the Captain stiffly. 'Good-day.'

He opened the door so abruptly that he brought himself almost into collision with the nose of the article clerk, which was inconveniently close to the door.

'A message from your Devonshire client, sir,' said Mr. Maulford, nothing abashed. 'He is sorry he can't be here till one.'

'That fellow was listening,' thought Captain Leland, as he went down the crooked old stairs. 'He is the image of Uriah Heep, and I hate the idea of Barbara seeing him every time she visits her father.'

He had arranged to meet the two girls at a pastrycook's in the Strand, and to finish the day with them at a picture-gallery. He made his way across Lincoln's-inn-fields, pierced divers lanes and narrow streets, and arrived in good time at a tawdry little shop, where Bab and Flossie were sitting at a marble table, in a fly-spotted apartment garnished with libellous looking-glasses, contemplating a salt-cellar and a pepper-box. It was a time when the eating-places of London were small, obscure, and inconvenient, with some few brilliant exceptions, which were all strictly masculine. The good little Italian coffee and ice shops were unknown. A hungry wayfarer might have roamed all over London in quest of a steak and potatoes *à la Française*, and a good cup of coffee.

'Well,' said Flossie eagerly, when the Captain had ordered strawberry-ices, and taken his seat at the marble table, 'did you see papa?'

'Yes.'

'And was he nice?'

'Do you wish me to be strictly candid?'

'You know I delight in candour.'

'Then I'm afraid I must say that he was nasty.'

'Now you'd hardly expect that from a man who is nobody's enemy but his own,' said Flossie, with an aggrieved air. 'I thought he would have been delighted at the idea of getting rid of one of us. I daresay if you had offered to take me to India he would have been in raptures. But Barbara never asks him for anything; she only sits and twiddles her parasol.'

'Your father had higher views for you, Barbara,' said the Captain, with a tender look at his betrothed. 'Can I blame him for that?'

Barbara opened her lovely eyes to their widest extent, full of innocent wonder.

'What can he mean by higher views?' she asked.

'He thinks you worthy of a suitor better placed in the

world—more independent than a soldier in the service of **JOHN** Company.'

'But we don't know a mortal in half such a good position as yours,' protested Flossie; 'you are quite the grandest person we have ever been intimate with. Really the author of our being is lapsing into idiocy.'

'Never mind his idiocy, Flossie,' said the Captain, smiling at her seriousness: 'I have made him understand pretty plainly that Barbara and I are engaged, and that we shall not wait for his consent to get married.'

'What do you think of the Author?' asked Flossie.

'Of your father? Well, he looks like a gentleman.'

'He always looks clean,' said Flossie; 'his shirt-fronts and wristbands are perfection. If anything could reconcile me to his manifold shortcomings, it would be his cleanliness. I could not respect a dirty father, if he were a Howard and a Wilberforce rolled into one. What did you think of Mr. Maulford, pa's articulated clerk?'

'What do you think of him?'

'I frankly detest him,' answered Flossie.

'Will you tell me why?' inquired the Captain earnestly.

'I haven't the least idea. It is a case of Dr. Fell. The reason why I cannot tell, but I utterly loathe and abominate that young man.'

'So do I,' said Captain Leland. 'Now I wonder, Flossie, whether we are right or wrong? Is it a wise instinct that makes us dislike Mr. Maulford, or is it a foolish prejudice? Is it because there is something of the human cobra under that smooth exterior of his? or is it because our eye for colour is offended by the disagreeable tint of his hair?'

'I am sure he is a human cobra,' said Flossie. "'I thank thee, Jew, for teaching me that word.'" First and foremost, he always listens at doors. I have caught him at it more than once.'

'I caught him to-day,' said the Captain. 'Has he been long in your father's office?'

'Ages—three years at the least. Papa has a great opinion of him. I believe he is to be a partner by and by. If papa has three clients—and I shouldn't think he had more—that will be one and a half apiece.'

'You have a very low estimate of your father's practice.'

'How can I help it? In all the times I have favoured him with a morning call, the nearest approach to a client that I have seen was one elderly woman in a poke-bonnet. Papa said she had once owned a great deal of property, and that he was trying to get it back for her. From my experience of the **Author's** character, I should say it was much more likely that

he was trying to get what was left of the property for himself. With the exception of that decayed female, I have never seen a mortal in pa's offices; and that doesn't seem much of a business to divide between two, does it?' demanded Flossie.

'Perhaps it is a better business than it appears to the naked eye,' said Captain Leland, not feeling particularly cheerful about his future father-in-law.

But he dismissed all painful thoughts, and gave himself up to the dreamy delight of watching Barbara as she ate her strawberry-ice, savouring it with a lingering enjoyment.

They went to the National Gallery, and prowled about among the old pictures, in which Flossie alone pretended to be ever so faintly interested. While she was peering into a magnificent Claude, at that date in a condition of unrestored dinginess, trying to find out 'how it was done,' George Leland and his betrothed stood side by side before pictures which neither of them saw, wholly absorbed in each other.

'I hope you are not disheartened by your interview with my father?' Barbara faltered timidly. 'I'm afraid he is not exactly the person you would have chosen for a father-in-law.'

'Dearest love, I chose you,' Leland answered warmly. 'If you had fifty uncomfortable relations in the background, it would not make a shadow of difference.'

'You are so good!' she murmured.

'No, dear; but I love you so dearly.'

CHAPTER VII.

'WHEN WE TWO PARTED.'

It was the morning on which George Leland was to sail. The Peninsular and Oriental steam-packet *Hesper* was to leave Southampton on this September day, which was dawning in palest yellow and faintest purple above the roofs and steeples, the Hollandish canal, the ripening apples in the Camberwell garden, lighting up the little bedroom where Barbara and Flossie slept with a spectral gleam, so cold, so pallid, so unlike all other lights of earth as to seem unearthly.

That pale ghostly day peered in through the white blind, and patched the little room with light. A gleam yonder on the plaster cast of a winged angel on the mantelpiece; a slanting ray across the hanging shelves where Bab and Flossie kept their pet books, devotional and poetical; a wandering glimmer on the little table where Bab's workbasket ran over with rags of unfinished work, and many-coloured tangles of silk and wool.

Bab raised herself upon her elbow and looked, O, how hopelessly ! at the dim shrouded window. She had been lying broad awake in her little white-curtained bed all night, and tossing her weary head from side to side upon her pillow, and bringing upon herself much oburgation in muffled and sleepy tones from Flossie, whose rest had been considerably disturbed by these agitations. Flossie was now fast asleep, lying on her back, with her arms folded above her head, and her tip-tilted nose pointing straight up to heaven ; and when Flossie was sound asleep a cannon might have been fired in the next room without waking her.

Bab stared piteously at the cold blank day, the day that was to see her lover leave England. Her cheeks were damp with those last tears with which she had wept herself to sleep for just one hour of troubled slumber, made terrible by dreams of parting. She had dreamt that they two were standing on a narrow ledge of rock, a little boat tossing below them, her arms clinging round his neck, as if by the sheer might of love she would have kept him from that hungry sea. But lo, suddenly he had slipped, he had melted from her arms ; and looking up to the remote edge of a lurid horizon she had seen a steamer moving swiftly across the sun-bright waters, through waves that seemed flecked with blood. The little Swiss clock over the mantelpiece—a mere toy, but it kept time occasionally for a day or two—struck five while Barbara pondered on her dream. A gleam of colour flashed into her face, her eyes brightened.

‘There would be time,’ she said to herself ; ‘the train leaves Vauxhall at a quarter to seven. There would be time.’

She looked at the slumbering Flossie. It would be unfair to say of so pretty a girl that she snored ; but Flossie was breathing with considerable vehemence.

‘I wonder whether it would be a very wrong thing to do ?’ mused Bab. ‘He would not think it wrong, I know, or, if he did, he would be glad all the same. Mamma might be a little vexed at first, but I am sure she would forgive me. She knows how unhappy I am.’

Barbara rose, and drew up the blind very softly, though she need hardly have been so careful, since the Seven Sleepers never slumbered more profoundly than Flossie for the time being. It was by the quantity, and not by the quality, of their slumbers that the famous Seven distanced the younger Miss Trevornock.

The morning was lovely : that exquisite tranquillity of early day beautified, even sanctified, the prospect which Barbara looked out upon. The dark tracery of the orchard trees was so delicately defined against that pure citron sky. The slender chimney-shafts, the aspiring steeples, had a tone of deepest purple yonder where the higher heaven was brightening to rose-colour.

Clouds like painted dragons sailed slowly across the sky. There was such an air of utter calm upon all things that Barbara fancied there was no one awake in the world but herself.

'Yes, I daresay it is wrong,' she said to herself softly, as she quietly began her toilet, 'but I shall go. Why should I not do a foolish thing once in my life, for his sake? It will make me happier to have seen him at the very last. Yes, it will be just one ray of light in the darkness of the years to come. Three years, three years, at the very least; and through all that time he will be in the midst of danger, face to face with death! O love, how can I bear my life without you for three years!'

She was dressed by a quarter to six, and then she sat down at her own particular little table, and wrote a few lines in pencil to Flossie:

'Dear Flossie,—Tell my darling mother that I felt almost too unhappy to live this morning, and that my only chance of consolation is to go down to Southampton, and see him for one little moment at the very last. I am going by the parliamentary train, third class, and I shall be back somehow before dark to-night. I have just enough money for the journey. Beg dearest mother to forgive me. She knows how dearly I love him.—Your affectionate

BARBARA.'

This note she impaled upon the pincushion with a big shawl-pin, and then she paused for an instant, smiling at her own image in the glass, half in sadness, half in jest.

'It seems such a desperate thing to do,' she said to herself. 'I feel almost as if I were going to elope.'

She wore her plainest garments—a dark dress, a black-silk jacket, a neat straw bonnet, and thick veil. It was in the days of bonnets and veils, when women's faces were not so much in evidence as they are now. A girl as lovely as Barbara might pass you in the street unobserved if she wished to do so.

Barbara knew the way to Vauxhall perfectly, and she was a splendid walker. There was nearly an hour for the walk, by Camberwell New-road and Kennington Oval and streets and roads beyond. Away she tripped through the dewy morning, under the brightening sky, finding as she went that there were a good many people awake in the world besides herself. Just as she came to the station her courage began suddenly to falter.

'Suppose he should think it a very unladylike thing for me to do?' she asked herself. 'It is unladylike. Yes; I feel that it is. A lady ought to sit at home and cry quietly, all to herself. Besides, if he had wanted to see me again, he might have come to Camberwell. However much he had to do at the last, he might have managed it somehow.'

These reflections came upon her at the foot of the squalid

wooden stairs leading up to the station. She paused, hesitated, was half inclined to turn back, when she heard the shriek of an engine. Her train, she thought.

'I don't care what he may think of me,' she said; 'I will see my darling once again. How do I know that he will ever come back to me? How do I know that those savage Sikhs will not kill him?'

She ran quickly up the stairs, and arrived at the booking-office breathless, and took her place in a little procession of shabbily-dressed travellers—shabby, but happily not dirty or disreputable. A better kind of voyagers use the third class than Luxury, reclining in the padded corner of a Pullman car, could imagine.

Barbara took her ticket, and waited for the heavily-laden parliamentary, which puffed itself laboriously into the station five minutes after her arrival on the platform. It teemed with life of the homeliest kind; it brimmed over with small children, clamorous and enthusiastic about the engine, which their parents and guardians had taught them to call 'Puffing Billy'—small children who looked upon a railway journey as a perpetual feast of parliament and peppermint-drops, and who made the atmosphere savoury with those compounds. Barbara found a corner in a caravan of families, a regular household ark. She sat between a brace of stout matrons, one nursing a baby, the other lavishing her attentions upon a birdcage, in which a canary of imbecile aspect hopped from one perch to the other and back again throughout the journey.

For Barbara that travelling nursery scarcely existed. The landscape, lovely with the rich colouring of early autumn, flitted past her gaze, impressing her as vaguely as a country seen in a dream. She was thinking of her lover and that far-away land whither he was going, its manifold dangers, its cruel remoteness.

It was still early in the day, hardly more than breakfast-time with the idle world, when 'Puffing Billy' steamed slowly into the Southampton terminus, with its freight of domesticity and that one eagerly-beating heart.

Landed on the crowded platform, a dreadful sense of desolation seized upon Barbara. This was the first journey she had ever taken alone; and now that the thing was done, the idea of its folly—nay, of its impropriety—came upon her suddenly with overwhelming force. She looked helplessly at the busy passengers intent upon the scramble for their luggage, feeling ashamed of herself because she had no luggage to scramble for. Gradually the crowd melted away, and there came a lull in the traffic. Absolute loneliness crept over the scene; and then Barbara, standing looking idly at an advertisement on the wall, felt as if she were the focus of every eye. The porters were wondering

about her; the man at the bookstall had his doubts as to her respectability. The door of the first-class waiting-room stood invitingly open, revealing the luxurious accommodation within—morocco-covered seats, a Bible, a decanter of whity-brown water; but Barbara was too conscientious to avail herself of these comforts. As a third-class passenger it would have seemed to her a kind of thieving to take a seat in the first-class waiting-room.

She wandered up and down the platform, and then sat down on a bench and took her lover's last letter out of her pocket.

His plans for his last day in England were clearly stated.

'I shall leave Taunton by an early train that will land me in Southampton soon after midday. The Hesper will start at three in the afternoon. Ah, dear love, how sadly I shall think of you at the last!'

Soon after midday! It was now close upon noon. Barbara had eaten nothing that day. She felt faint and sick, yet she had not the courage to go to the refreshment-room, and fortify herself with a doughy bun and a glass of lemonade. She sat on her bench, staring vaguely at the trains for nowhere, which were perpetually being shunted.

Presently, when the clock had struck twelve, and time was creeping on at a pace which made every minute seem a quarter of an hour, she mustered courage to ask a porter how soon there would be a train from Taunton.

The porter knew nothing about Taunton, but he told her there was a Salisbury train due at a quarter to one.

Three-quarters of an hour. What a heart-sickening business it was to sit there and watch the tardy hands of that aggravating clock! Her sleepless night and the motion of the railway-carriage had given Barbara a racking headache. Another London train came in, and riot and confusion had the mastery for the next ten minutes; then again came a lull and all-pervading emptiness. Anon the porters began to look along the rails towards Bishopstoke in an indifferent manner, as if there might or might not be a train coming. Then the bell which had rung for the London train began to ring again; an engine slowly rounded a curve, and noiselessly brought in its long line of carriages.

A number of heads were put out of windows. Barbara's eyes roamed despairingly along that tangle of strange faces. This must be his train. He must be there; but she could not see him. The faces swelled and oscillated before her clouding eyes. Her journey had been a useless folly. He was not there.

A dreadful humming noise, like a thousand wheels going round, came in her ears; and all those strange faces melted into a thick black cloud. When she recovered her senses, she was sitting on a sofa in the waiting-room, with her head lying on George Leland's shoulder. His arms were round her, holding

her up. He had been putting wine to her pallid lips; but the wine which revived her was the love shining out of his dark eyes, the tender words breathed into her awakening ear.

'My darling, my own true love, what a surprise, what a delight to find you here! My sweet girl, who brought you? How did you come?'

'Nobody brought me,' she answered faintly, faint from actual inanition. 'I came quite alone, by the parliamentary train. I wanted so much to see you. You're not very angry with me, are you, George?' she faltered.

'Angry, my angel! How can I ever love you dearly enough for this sweet folly? God knows there is no room in my heart for more love than I bear you.'

They were quite alone in the waiting-room; his arms were round her; he drew the sweet pale lips to meet his own in a kiss that was half passion, half despair.

'O my dear one, how can I leave you?' he murmured. 'This meeting makes it harder to part.'

As they were seated thus, side by side, the girl locked in her lover's arms, a gentleman, debonair of aspect, brisk of movement, carrying a neat little leather bag and a slim umbrella, passed the window, caught a glimpse of a face he knew, turned, and repassed much more slowly; then, seeing those two wholly absorbed in each other, he lingered, and peered in upon them through the waiting-room window. When he had quite satisfied himself as to the identity of these two young people, he walked slowly away to the further end of the platform, and remained there, watchful from a distance, till George Leland and his sweetheart came arm-in-arm out of the waiting-room, she white as a lily, he anxiously intent on her wan face.

'My dearest, you are so pale,' said the Captain.

'I'm afraid, George,' she murmured hesitatingly, 'that it's because I haven't had any breakfast. Perhaps if I were to have a bun—'

'My dear love, what an inconsiderate brute I am! No breakfast! and you left home so early, and you have travelled so far. We will go to an hotel this instant.'

'But you have so much to do. There is your luggage.'

'I will manage about that. All my big trunks are on board. I have only a few oddments,' said the Captain, looking at a truck-load of carpet-bags, hatboxes, desks, portmanteaux, and gun-cases, which stood abandoned and unowned in the middle of the platform. 'Here, porter, get those things taken on board the steamer *Hesper* directly, like a good fellow.'

He tossed half-a-crown to the man, and with Barbara still on his arm left the station.

The gigantic hotel which now adjoins the terminus had in

those days no existence. George Leland called a fly, and drove straight to the Dolphin in Southampton High-street. It was the only hotel he knew, and here he was sure of getting a decent breakfast. He asked for a private room, and ordered tea, coffee, cold chicken, ham and eggs, with a reckless prodigality.

'I am so sorry you should take all this trouble,' said Barbara. 'A bun would have done just as well.'

'A bun! A lump of indigestion! My pet, is it much that we should have one parting meal together when you have come so far to bid me a last good-bye! Come and sit by this open window, dear, and let the fresh air blow the colour back into your cheeks. How confoundedly slow they are with this breakfast!' cried the Captain, who had only given his orders within the last five minutes. 'I know you are dying for a cup of tea. How good of your mother to let you come!'

'She didn't let me,' said Barbara, blushing vehemently; 'I came away before any one was up. Nobody knew anything about it. I had been awake all night—so miserable about you; and then towards morning I had a fearful dream. And when I saw the cold gray dawn, and knew that it was the last day on which it was possible for me to see you, an unconquerable desire to come and say good-bye to you seized hold of me. I knew if I stayed at home, that afterwards, when it was too late, I should hate myself for not coming; so I came, and I hope you don't think I have done very wrong, and that you don't utterly despise me.'

'Despise you!' cried the Captain. 'I love you to madness.'

'Yes; but you might do that, and despise me a little all the same.'

'My love, you have done no wrong. You have acted with true womanliness, not schoolgirlish constraint. I love you, I honour you, for this dear proof of your love. Do you think it will not make me happy far away to remember this morning? "She loved me so well when we parted," I shall say to myself, "can I doubt that she will remain constant till I go back to her?"'

'Constant!' she echoed sadly. 'It will be no merit in me to be constant. It is a part of my nature to love you. George, I verily believe I loved you at first sight, that day I saw you come in at the garden-gate, when Flossie was vociferating about your dark complexion, and your moustache, and your military air. I said nothing, but my soul was full of admiration. You looked brave and noble; you were my ideal hero; you looked every inch a soldier—a man born to fight and conquer. But, O, how I wish you were anything in this wide world except a soldier, and that you were not going away this day!'

'Would you like me to be a draper or a grocer?' he asked, ringing the bell violently for the breakfast, which by this time

had been ordered about ten minutes. 'Why doesn't that fellow bring your tea?'

'I shouldn't like it,' said Bab, making a wry face; 'for I am so proud that you are what you are. But I should like to have you at home.'

'If they would make me Commander-in-Chief, for instance, or give me some snug berth of that sort! No, love, I believe I was born to work and fight; and there is plenty of work and fighting waiting for me out yonder. O, here comes this tea at last!'

A sumptuous breakfast was being laid while the Captain grumbled: a shiny tongue, cold chicken, kidneys and ham and eggs in covered silver dishes, a rack of dry toast—all in vain. Captain Leland was in no mood for eating, and Barbara could take nothing but the cup of strong tea which her lover poured out for her, and a little bit of toast, just enough to revive exhausted nature. Yet they lingered over the meal, and it was infinitely sweet to them to be together.

'Is it a dangerous passage?' asked Barbara. 'Are there ever shipwrecks?'

'Never,' answered the Captain, with conviction; 'nobody ever heard of an accident by the P. and O. The thing's unknown.'

'I am glad of that. And does the steamer really start at three?'

'She does, love. And, unhappily it's striking two at this moment. We must be going, Barbara.'

'May I walk with you to the docks? May I see the steamer?'

'Dearest, don't you think it would be better for me to take you to the station, and put you into a train? There's one leaves at two thirty-five. We should be just in time for it. I can't bear the idea of leaving you alone in a strange place.'

'No,' she cried impetuously; 'I will not be taken to the station. I have come to see the last of you. I will not leave till the steamer sails. What does it matter about me? I am only a miserable stay-at-home creature. No harm can come to me.'

He argued the point, but vainly. She had set her heart on seeing him till the last possible moment. So he consulted the time-table again, and found that there was a train that left for London at four o'clock, and arrived at a little after seven. A cab would take her to Camberwell by eight.

Captain Leland paid for the breakfast which nobody had eaten, and he and Barbara left the Dolphin, and walked slowly down the High-street towards the glistening water.

'What a calm and happy river it looks!' said Bab. 'And to think that it is going to take all I love away!'

'Not all you love, darling. You will have your mother and Flossie.'

'My mother—yes ; I love her dearly ; and Flossie is a good kind little thing. But I want you too.'

There was a good deal of conversation of this kind, more or less unreasonable on Barbara's side, yet full of an unselfish tenderness which touched her lover's heart. They walked to and fro for a little while on the platform by the placid shining water. The Captain talked of the fair future that was to see them united, and tried his utmost to cheer Barbara with visions of happiness to come ; for there was a growing despair in the girl's face—a look that told of the tension of a mind racked beyond its power of suffering—which frightened him. The time came when her lips grew dumb. She could only answer him by a motion of her head. Her eyes had a look that was a hundredfold more piteous than tears.

They went together to the steamer ; and here—so commonplace are the necessities of daily life—the Captain was obliged to leave Barbara sitting forlornly upon somebody else's campstool, while he went to inquire about his luggage. He found her as still as a statue, the incarnation of silent anguish, when he came back to her. The bustle and movement of the scene passed by her without making the faintest impression.

'Darling,' he said very gently, 'the boat will start in five minutes. I must take you back to the shore.'

'O !' she cried, as if she had been hurt ; 'so soon, so soon !'

'Love, in a few short years I shall come back.'

'They will not be short. They will be agonising in their length. O, write to me soon, George, at the very first opportunity ! How shall I live till I get your letter ?'

'My dearest, think of others—your dear mother ; she has such a strong claim upon you.'

He was leading her gently to the gangway that was to take her back to shore. At the last moment, when they were standing on that frail bridge, heedless of the gaze of the multitude, he folded her to his heart for the last time, and let her lips meet his in a despairing kiss.

For her the world was as empty as Eden. She had no thought of the eyes that were looking at her.

'God bless you ; God be with you, my own dear love !' said George Leland.

She was standing on the shore, among other people all intent on the departing steamer. Her lover was lost in the crowd on deck. A bell was ringing. The turbid water was rolling up against the keel of the vessel, as she swayed with the motion of her labouring engines.

'These partings are hard,' said a friendly voice at the Captain's side. 'Your young wife seems deeply affected. I hope she is not alone. No, I see she has a gentleman with her.'

The speaker, an elderly civilian with white whiskers and a benevolent expression, was watching the shore through his field-glass. Leland looked in the same direction, and saw two figures in that fast-receding picture—Barbara and Mr. Maulford, the articulated clerk. He was standing by her side, talking to her with an air of deepest interest.

‘What, in the name of all that’s unpleasant, brings that fellow here?’ thought the Captain.

CHAPTER VIII.

TOO CIVIL BY HALF.

‘CAN I be of any use to you, Miss Trevornock?’ asked Mr. Maulford. ‘Let me get you out of the crowd. Are you staying at Southampton?’

‘No,’ Barbara answered, with her eyes following the departing steamer; ‘I am going back to London immediately. Don’t take any trouble about me; I can find my way to the station.’

‘I could not think of leaving you. I am going back to town by the four-o’clock train; till then I am perfectly free. You are going to meet friends at the station, perhaps?’

The steamer was growing a mere speck far away on the bright blue water; but Barbara’s eyes held it still; for her it was the centre of the universe. Mr. Maulford repeated his inquiry.

‘I beg your pardon,’ faltered Barbara absently; and then suddenly becoming aware of the drift of his question, she answered carelessly, ‘No; there will be no one to meet me. I am going home alone.’

‘May I be permitted to take care of you on the journey? I am travelling by the same train.’

‘I will not trouble you. I am going third class; I daresay you are going first.’

‘The pleasure of being in your society will more than compensate me for any difference in the accommodation. Besides, I really think a third-class carriage is pleasanter than a first-class in such weather as this.’

‘Bar the dust and the style of one’s fellow-passengers,’ added Mr. Maulford inwardly.

‘You are very kind,’ said Barbara; ‘I don’t want to be rude, but I had much rather travel alone. I am out of spirits, and it would worry me to have to talk to anybody.’

‘You will let me put you into your carriage, at least.’

‘Of course; I cannot object to that. But don’t put yourself

out of the way to do it. The station is so near. I know my way ; there is no difficulty.'

'I shall be miserable if you refuse me so small a privilege,' said Mr. Maulford.

So they walked side by side to the station, Barbara profoundly silent, the artful clerk watchful of her white pained face.

'Have you any message for your father?' he asked presently.

'No. My sister and I will be calling on him soon, I daresay.'

'Perhaps you would prefer that I should say nothing about my having had the pleasure of meeting you here,' suggested Mr. Maulford, with an unpleasant expression in his red-brown eyes.

'I do not care one straw about it,' answered Barbara, flushing. 'You are quite at liberty to tell my father that I came down here this morning alone to take leave of Captain Leland, my future husband. Perhaps it is not exactly what another girl would have done under the circumstances ; but my father knows that Flossie and I have not been brought up like other girls. We have lived in our own little world.'

'And are not governed by the hard-and-fast lines of society, with its narrow restrictions,' said Mr. Maulford, with an odious air of patronage. 'Strange that I should have happened to meet you, wasn't it? I came down to arrange a little bit of conveying business, and, finding myself with a spare hour after my work was finished, strolled to the docks, where there is always something going on. Here we are at the station. I'll go and see if the train's made up, and secure you a good place. I wish you would let me exchange tickets with you ; you might find the first class more comfortable.'

'No, thank you. I am more at home in a third-class carriage. I travelled down very comfortably. There were nice motherly women with birdcages.'

'Very well ; I'll try to find you some motherly women for the return journey. I suppose you don't insist upon birdcages.'

Barbara sat on the bench where she had waited for her lover's coming, while Mr. Maulford went off to make his inquiries. She was thinking of that departing steamer, sailing so blithely over a summer sea ; she was following it with her thoughts, as she had followed it a little while ago with her eyes. Mr. Maulford came back to say that he had found a seat in a comfortable compartment where there was a motherly female.

'It's a second-class carriage,' he said, as he conducted Barbara to the train. 'It's all right ; I've squared the guard.'

'I'm sorry you've taken so much trouble,' said Barbara, writhing under the sense of obligation ; 'the third class would have done just as well.'

'I wish you'd let me travel in the same carriage.'

'I'd much rather be alone.'

'Very well, Miss Trevornock ; your will is law. Don't take any trouble when you get to the terminus ; I shall be in the way to put you into a cab.'

'Thank you,' said Barbara, hating him intensely for his civility.

She told him that she had started from Vauxhall, but he said it would be better for her to go on to Waterloo. She would be more sure of a cab.

All through the homeward journey her thoughts were following her lover, following him with sadness and longing. Sometimes a tear slid slowly down her pale cheeks under her veil, she too deep in thought to know that she was crying. The motherly female made her hospitable offers of sandwiches and butter-scotch, which were politely declined. The journey seemed to prolong itself to an unendurable tedium. Towards the latter part of the time she began to think a little of her mother and Flossie, and what would be their opinion of her day's work.

'I don't care much,' she said to herself ; 'it would hardly hurt me if mamma were angry. My heart is one big pain.'

Mr. Maulford appeared directly the train stopped, as if he had been waiting on the platform. Barbara thought he must have risked his life in getting to her so quickly. He put her into a cab, paid the driver, and took his ticket.

'I've paid the man,' he said, putting his head in at the window. 'These fellows always try to impose on a lady. Good-evening !'

'Good-evening,' answered Barbara coldly, very ungrateful for attentions which had been forced upon her ; and as the cab drove off she flung herself back in a corner, and sobbed out her great sorrow, while the vehicle jogged along the Waterloo-road, where the meagre dimly-lighted shops looked the quintessence of shabbiness.

She need not have feared anger at home. She was welcomed like the returning prodigal.

'O you poor tired thing !' cried Flossie, prancing out to receive the wanderer. 'How white and ill you look ! And the idea of coming home in a cab ! What recklessness ! Come upstairs and take off your bonnet. We've got such a tea ! Do be quick, dear. I'm absolutely starving.'

Mrs. Trevornock was in the hall.

'My foolish darling !' she said, giving Barbara a hug. 'How-ever could you do such a thing ? I've been wretched about you all day.'

'And I thought if ma made one of her hot cakes for tea it would distract her mind,' interjected Flossie. 'She did nothing all the afternoon but moan about railway accidents—as if an express was going to run into a parliamentary just because you were travelling !'

Ten minutes afterwards they were all sitting snugly at the round table in the garden parlour, the table where George Leland had sat so often in the brief happy summer. Barbara's spirits revived in that loving companionship. She enjoyed Mrs. Trevornock's strong tea and the inimitable pound-cake, and she was able to tell her adventures, which Flossie insisted upon having in detail. That young lady was particularly impressed by the breakfast at the Dolphin.

'I never was inside an hotel in my life,' she said, 'or at any rate since I can remember. What a heavenly breakfast! Shouldn't I have appreciated it! I'm afraid you didn't, Bab.'

'I wasn't very hungry,' answered Barbara, smiling faintly.

'No, you reserved your appetite for the widow and the orphan's tea,' said Flossie.

CHAPTER IX.

THE CORNISH CLIENT.

NEARLY a year had gone since the sailing of the *Hesper*. The roses in the Camberwell garden, the sweet-smelling purple stocks and carnations, breathing all the spices of Ceylon, were basking in the July sunshine. Barbara was sitting in a wicker-chair under the biggest of the pear-trees, while Flossie lay on the grass at her sister's feet, reading a well-thumbed novel, borrowed, at a penny the volume, from the limited collection of a shabby little library in a shabby little street near at hand. There had been no more partial boarders at 20 South-lane. Mrs. Trevornock had managed to get on somehow without that source of income. She and the two girls had pinched and scraped, and been infinitely happy in doing without things. They were able to live upon so little. The boxes from aunt Sophia supplied them with plenty of finery. That agony of being shabbily clad, which women feel so keenly, was not imposed upon them. The girls always looked better dressed than any of their neighbours. Thus they had lived on, from hand to mouth, contentedly. If illness had come with its manifold expenses the little household must have been shipwrecked, or must have sent forth a cry for help to the rich relations, who had done so much to help already. Happily there had been no such calamity. Barbara had drooped a little after her lover's departure, but had speedily taken courage, and had resumed the even tenor of her way with all her old sweetness.

It had been decided, in family council across the cosy tea-table, that there should be no more partial boarders.

'We should feel as if we were vulgarising ourselves if we

were to open our doors to any comer,' remarked Mrs. Trevornock.

'We might get a vulgarian,' said Barbara.

'We might get a husband for *me*,' said Flossie; 'Bab has had her turn.'

'You wouldn't like our house to be a husband-trap, Flossie?' remonstrated Barbara.

'O no, of course not. But still you have had your chance, you know: and if I don't meet with a husband in this house I am doomed to die an old maid, attached to cats and things, and looked down upon by my fellow-creatures. The three or four acquaintance, with whom we have the honour of drinking tea occasionally, can't produce an eligible young man among them.'

'I don't think Captain Leland would like us to take another boarder,' said Mrs. Trevornock.

'Perhaps not; but it's rather hard that Captain Leland's jealousy should be allowed to stand in *my* light,' protested Flossie.

This ill-used damsel found her wishes overruled by the majority. No further advertisement, from this one particular lady, with a house larger than she required, appeared in the columns of the *Times*, and the Trevornocks managed to fight the battle of daily life without the aid of a boarder. The house looked bright and pretty, the little maid-of-all-work received her wages on quarter-day, the tax-collector went away satisfied, and the surrounding tradesmen had no right to speak evil of Mrs. Trevornock. If the dinners at 20 South-lane were skimpy—or sometimes even non-existent—the teas were luxurious. The little servant was red and chubby, though there were days on which no butcher's-meat crossed the threshold of her mistress's door.

Captain Leland had proved, so far, an excellent correspondent. Every mail brought Barbara a letter, in which, on the flimsiest of paper, the Captain related all that he had done, and discoursed eloquently upon all he felt, in that language which is the delight of lovers and the wonder of everybody else.

Barbara read and re-read the flimsy letters, wept over them a little in secret, and replied in letters of even greater length, lavishing the treasures of her young soul upon her far-away lover, having nothing to tell him but her love, and telling that with the passion of an undeveloped poet.

The happiest days of her eventless life were those on which she wrote to her betrothed. Those days were held sacred in the little household. Mother and sister respected her privacy. Bab must have the front parlour all to herself, they said. Bab was writing her Indian letter. And on such days Flossie and her mother would devote themselves to some special task of tidying or muddling, as the case might be. They would look over the

half-forgotten treasures of some up stairs cupboard, as various as the contents of a marine-store dealer's shop. They would arrange and classify ancient rubbish, and waste time with a semblance of being intensely industrious. Only by such innocent self-deceptions, unconscious as the delusions of lunacy, could the burden of a monotonous life have sat so lightly on these simple women's shoulders.

One bright July morning Mrs. Trevornock sat down to breakfast with a countenance of unusual gravity. She breathed a gentle sigh as she poured out the tea, and she watched Flossie's bold onslaught on the four-ounce pat of butter with a gaze of mild reproachfulness.

'My dears,' she said presently, 'I have got another tax.'

'O mother dear, don't say that!' cried Bab. 'I thought we were clear till next Christmas.'

'So did I, Bab, when I told you so,' sighed Mrs. Trevornock. 'But you know I always have been stupid about those tax-papers—'

'Frightfully dense, poor dear ma, I admit,' interjected Flossie.

'And I had quite overlooked this one. It's Queen's, I believe, and it's rather heavy.'

'Queen's, indeed!' ejaculated Flossie. 'Why can't Victoria carry on her affairs without worrying us? We don't go to Windsor Castle to worry her. It's a ridiculously one-sided arrangement!'

'It comes to one pound seven-and-sixpence for the half-year,' said Mrs. Trevornock; 'and if it's not paid by next Thursday I shall be summoned.'

Here Mrs. Trevornock became suddenly absorbed in the teapot, which wanted more water; and when she had gazed into the teapot for some moments, as if intent upon finding an augury in the leaves, she lifted her eyes and looked with meek appeal at Flossie.

'O,' cried that young lady, with an impatient shrug of her shoulders, 'I know what you mean, ma, and you might just as well speak out. You want me to go and see if I can get the money out of Mr. T.'

This was Flossie's way of speaking of her father.

'I thought you and Barbara might call on him this morning, dear.'

'I and Barbara!' exclaimed Flossie. 'You might just as well say I and an umbrella. Bab is no more use than one. She doesn't back me up by so much as a word, but only sits and looks a picture of placid loveliness. However, I suppose we must go and see what can be done. It's lucky you've one daughter who's not afraid to speak her mind. I should never get a sixpence out of Mr. T. if I didn't make him shake in his shoes.'

Half an hour after breakfast the two girls set out upon their expedition. Funds were at a low ebb in South-lane, too low even to allow the cheap luxury of a Waterloo omnibus; but the girls thought nothing of a walk to Gray's Inn on a fine fresh summer morning, when the shops in the Walworth-road looked their brightest, and there was a gaiety in the atmosphere as of unseen birds and butterflies. There was a good deal of dust at the corners of bye-streets, but the newly-watered roads breathed a refreshing coolness, suggestive of woodland streams. Gray's Inn, with its grassy lawns and famous catalpa tree, planted by Francis Bacon, seemed a haven of greenery on this July morning.

'What a nice shady sober old place it is!' cried Flossie. 'I almost wish *we* had chambers here. It would be so handy for the theatres.'

The customary boy opened the door, and Mr. Maulford emerged as usual from his adjacent den, eager-eyed and politely officious.

'I think you will have to wait a few minutes, Miss Trevornock,' he said, addressing Barbara—he always ignored Flossie. 'Your papa has a client with him.'

'The bells shall be rung, and the mass shall be sung,' murmured Flossie, to whom an actual client in her father's office seemed a phenomenon worthy of note.

'I believe he's just going,' said Mr. Maulford. 'I'll announce you if you like, and that will hurry him.'

Before Barbara could say no, the article clerk opened the door and announced Miss Trevornock and Miss Flora.'

A tall ungainly-looking man was standing in front of the office-table talking to Mr. Trevornock.

Barbara thought him the awkwardest man she had ever seen. He was largely-made and broad-shouldered, but bony. All the angles of his figure were prominently defined under his loose gray garments. His clothes seemed of coarser fabric than the stuffs commonly worn by gentlemen in those days. He had large features, regular in outline, but ruggedly cut. His face was weather-beaten; his coarse hair and whiskers were of dull brown mixed with duller gray. His shaggy brows made a pent-house over his severe gray eyes. He wore no gloves. His boots were thick and clumsy, and his very indifferent hat was flung carelessly on the back of his head.

'A very common kind of person,' thought Flossie, dropping into a chair, after saluting her father with a pert little nod.

The client looked round at the entrance of the young ladies, and hastily removed his hat, which appeared to be a repository for old gloves and business documents.

'I think that's all, Trevornock,' he said. 'You perfectly understand me? I'll stand no nonsense from these people.'

'I should have known that without your telling me,' said Mr. Trevornock, without looking up from his desk. 'You never do stand nonsense of that kind.'

'Of course not. If they can't pay they must turn out. What is it to me that they and their people have had the land seventy years? That kind of sentiment won't fill my pockets.'

'Much more likely to empty them,' replied Mr. Trevornock.

The client took up his walking-stick, which was as thick as a young tree, and moved towards the door slowly, hesitatingly, with his eyes fixed on Barbara, as if he were in danger of taking root on the office-floor in the intensity of his wonderment. When the two girls had entered he had been absorbed in his business, and had not honoured them with a glance. Only by the clerk's announcement and the rustling of their garments had he known that they were women. Now he perceived that one of them was a lovelier woman than his eyes had ever looked upon, or so at least Barbara seemed to him in this moment of surprise. He was not a student of female loveliness, or of art, or books, or any of those things which make life beautiful; but he had an instinctive idea that this face on which his eyes were riveted was perfect beauty.

He lingered to say a few more words to Mr. Trevornock, and then went slowly out of the room, with his gaze fixed on Barbara to the last.

'What an utterly horrid man!' exclaimed Flossie, directly the outer door had shut on the stranger.

'You wouldn't say that if you knew who he was,' said Mr. Trevornock.

'Yes, I should. My knowledge of him wouldn't make the slightest difference. Such hair, such hands, such clothes, such boots, such a hat! The creature will haunt me like a nightmare. Pray are all your clients like that, papa?'

'I wish they were. That is one of the richest men in Cornwall.'

'Then what a beggarly county Cornwall must be!' retorted Flossie. 'Can't the poor thing afford himself a decent pair of boots?'

'The poor thing would think no more of buying a thousand acres of land than you would of buying a new bonnet,' retorted Mr. Trevornock.

'And yet wears such odious boots. Perhaps they are fashionable in Cornwall, though? Really country people should not be allowed to come to London without being edited and revised by a capable person. And pray who is this gray gentleman?'

'He is one of the largest landowners between Launceston and St. Columb,' said Mr. Trevornock. 'He is the owner of slate-quarries that produce four thousand a year. His father was

three times member for the county. He belongs to one of the oldest families in Cornwall. His name is Vyvyan Penruth. Do you want to know anything more about him ?

'Yes,' answered the unabashed Flossie. 'I should like to know who's his tailor ; so that, in the unlikely event of my ever wanting a riding-habit, I might go to somebody else.'

'Ah,' sighed Mr. Trevornock, producing his penknife, and going to work eagerly at his nails, which he had been constrained to neglect for the last hour, 'if your sister could marry such a man as that now, instead of her beggarly Indian Captain, she would be a lucky woman.'

'I would not exchange my Indian Captain for an emperor,' said Barbara, flaming up at this insult to her absent lover. 'And as for that horrid gray man, I would not marry him if I were a beggar in the street and he offered me half his fortune.'

'Well, you are never likely to be tempted,' said Mr. Trevornock. 'Penruth is not a marrying man. He has come to eight-and-forty years of age without ever thinking of a wife. It isn't very likely he'll begin now.'

'Eight-and-forty !' echoed Flossie. 'I should have thought he was a hundred. He looks like a fossil.'

'So would you, perhaps, if you had lived the best part of your life in an old house in the centre of a park on the Cornish moors, with only a brother and sister for your companions, and nothing to do from morning till night but ride round your own land.'

'Then why does he do it ?' demanded Flossie. 'Why doesn't he take a house in London and enjoy himself ? Why hasn't he a yacht ? Why doesn't he keep racehorses ? Is he a miser ?'

'I think not. But he has never fallen into the way of spending his money like other rich men. He is perhaps a little dull. He has no tastes or fancies. He has been brought up in a stupid secluded way ; and he cleaves to his dull life and his old country house as the snail cleaves to his shell. He is not a bad fellow by any means.'

'I daresay not, for those who can appreciate him,' answered Flossie.

Barbara gazed dreamily out of the window at a blank space of blue sky, and stifled a yawn.

Flossie proceeded to the business of the day. She made her application with firmness, but with as much modesty as she could command ; and Mr. Trevornock yielded with a better grace than usual, tossing three sovereigns across his desk for his younger daughter to pick up from among his papers. This she did deftly, and then pushed the siege a little further.

'We walked all the way here,' she said, 'and it was very warm. I'm sure you would not like us to walk home under the midday sun. If you could spare a little silver—'

'I wonder you don't ask for my teeth,' growled the outraged parent, as he reluctantly produced three-and-sixpence.

'They wouldn't be any use to us,' said Flossie naïvely; 'but a few pence to buy some buns.'

'O, deuce take you!' cried Mr. Trevornock, flinging her another sixpence. 'Why can't you ask for what you want at once? Here, do you want any paper and envelopes, sealing-wax, pens?'

He shuffled some stationery into a sheet of newspaper, and handed the packet to his unabashed child.

'If you knew what a struggle it is for us to have to buy even those trifles,' said Flossie apologetically.

'O, nonsense! Your mother's better off than I am. She has no office to keep, no clerks to pay.'

'No; but she has two daughters to provide for,' answered Barbara, who rarely took part in these discussions.

'Well, good-bye, girls,' said her father hurriedly. 'I've a great deal of work to get through this morning.'

His daughters took the hint and their departure, Flossie delighted with her success.

'What would ma do if she hadn't me?' she exclaimed triumphantly.

CHAPTER X.

PATERNAL INSTINCT IN MR. T.

THREE days after that visit to the office in Gray's Inn the most wonderful event happened. Mr. Trevornock sent his elder daughter a card for a private box at the Haymarket Theatre.

Such a thing had never before befallen the little family in South-lane. That Mr. Trevornock should voluntarily stretch forth his hand to give them pleasure was an altogether inscrutable thing.

'I can't make it out,' said Barbara, looking intently at the card.

'It doesn't look like an order,' remarked Flossie, with a business-like air, 'but it must be one, all the same. Mr. T. would never put his hand in his pocket to buy us a treat of this kind. I suppose some one gave him the ticket, and he didn't know what to do with it, until it flashed upon him all at once that he had a wife and daughters.'

There was even a little note with the ticket:

'Dear Barbara,—I enclose a box for the Haymarket for next Tuesday evening. Ask your mother to take you and Flora. I

understand the comedy now being performed there is well worth seeing.—Your affectionate father,

‘T. TREVORNOCK.’

‘It’s monstrously civil of him,’ said Flossie; ‘I begin to think that he must be dotingly fond of us, after all.’

The girls had not left off wondering at this unwonted attention on the paternal part when Tuesday came, and they set off under the maternal wing for the friendly Waterloo ‘bus, which was to deposit them almost at the door of the theatre. Their fresh muslin gowns, their blooming faces, made an oasis of beauty in the ‘bus, where the pervading effect was dinginess. They had white gloves and fans and other trifles of adornment in their mother’s reticule, and the cloak-room of the theatre was to see the final touches of their toilet.

Behold them anon seated in their box, adorning it as flowers adorn a window, so fresh in their attire and altogether lovely that it is difficult to believe they did not roll up to the theatre in a well-appointed brougham.

The play was one of those high and dry modern comedies for which this theatre used to be celebrated—well acted, well put upon the stage, without any pretension of elaborate realism, well dressed, without extravagance or eccentricity, having altogether a respectable and almost classic flavour.

For Barbara and Flossie to be at the theatre at all was for the time being to inhabit Paradise; and even Mrs. Trevornock was deeply interested, though not without a backward glancing thought of the young serving-maid, and whether she might or might not contrive to set the house on fire. She had even distracting ideas about an eighteenpenny lobster to be bought, possibly bargained for, on the way home. Yet she enjoyed the play, and pronounced sound criticism on its merits, as became a woman of some culture, who had read and thought in her time, although at present absorbed in domesticity.

The first act was over, and the two girls were surveying the house with bright young eyes which needed no aid from opera-glasses, when there came a knock at the box-door.

Gracious! cried Flossie, ‘what can that mean? I hope it isn’t some one come to say that the ticket is a forgery. I give Mr. T. credit for a good deal, but hardly for forging theatre-tickets.’

‘I suppose we had better open the door,’ said Mrs. Trevornock dubiously; and at this moment the knock was repeated.

‘I daresay it’s only some one worrying with ices,’ cried Flossie, darting to the door, which she opened with an energy indicative of impatience. ‘No, thank you, we don’t want any,’ she said sharply, before the door was quite open. But on looking at the intruder she perceived to her horror that it was not a young

woman with a tray of ices, but a tall man in dress-clothes, a man of angular figure, whom she recognised at a glance as Mr. Penruth, her father's Cornish client.

'I beg your pardon,' she stammered; 'I thought you were refreshments.'

He seemed hardly to hear her. His eyes looked over her head towards Barbara.

'I recognised you and your sister from the other side of the theatre,' he said, 'and I thought I might venture to pay my respects. Will you present me to your mother?'

'With pleasure,' answered Flossie. 'Ma, this is one of pa's clients. Ma, Mr. Penruth. Mr. Penruth, ma.'

Barbara had risen from her chair, blushing, not with pleasure, at the stranger's advent. She could not withhold her hand when Mr. Penruth held out his.

'How do you like the play?' he asked, addressing himself to Mrs. Trevornock, and dropping into the unoccupied chair, with an air of being very much at home.

Mrs. Trevornock told him her opinion of the first act.

'And the young ladies?' he asked, looking at Barbara from under his bushy brows; 'I hope they are pleased.'

'How can we help being pleased?' exclaimed the loquacious Flossie, who left very little margin for other people's conversation. 'We go to a play about once in a blue moon. I'm sure I can't imagine what inspired pa to send us a box for the theatre. It's quite out of keeping with his character to do such a thing.'

'Perhaps, while I am in town, you will allow me to send you tickets now and then?' said Mr. Penruth. 'I get a good many.'

'O,' exclaimed Flossie, 'then I daresay it was you who gave pa this one.'

'Yes, I sent him a box for to-night. I had no idea he would make such good use of it.'

'O!' said Flossie, beginning to make her own conclusions at a tremendous rate.

Vyvyan Penruth looked just a little more civilised in his conventional suit of black than he had appeared in his shooting-clothes and hobnailed boots; but he was still far below the standard of elegance. His bony angles were too obvious, his arms and legs were too long. His iron-gray hair and whiskers were in sore need of the barber's art; his complexion testified to nearly half a century's hard usage.

The curtain rose, and Barbara riveted her attention to the stage, replying only by monosyllables to Mr. Penruth's persevering attempts to draw her into conversation. Flossie's attention was divided between the play and the stranger. She could not wholly withdraw her attention from him, though she was deeply interested in the play.

Having established himself in the seat behind Mrs. Trevornock, Mr. Penruth showed no desire to withdraw. He was not in a very convenient position for seeing the play, but he remained for the rest of the evening, making himself as agreeable as he could to Barbara's mother, and trying very hard to improve his acquaintance with Barbara.

When the play was over he escorted the ladies to a cab, paid the driver and took his ticket, just as Mr. Maulford had done upon a previous occasion.

Mrs. Trevornock remonstrated, and tried to push her poor little purse into his hand, but in vain.

'You must really allow me,' he said; and Mrs. Trevornock allowed him.

'Well, ma,' exclaimed Flossie, as they drove past all the grandeurs of Trafalgar-square, 'what do you think of the horrid man?'

'I think him one of the most gentlemanly men I ever met,' answered Mrs. Trevornock, who was enthusiastic and fickle.

'O mamma!' ejaculated Barbara, with deep-toned reproachfulness.

'He certainly improves on acquaintance,' said Flossie. 'And he is going to send us more tickets for the play. If he always pays our cabs in that polite way, it will be very nice.'

'I'm going to no more of his plays,' said Barbara. 'I detest him!'

'O, nonsense!' cried Flossie. 'What's the good of detesting people who can be useful to one? I agree with mamma. Mr. Penruth's manners are eminently gentlemanlike; and when one considers that he has slate-quarries and things—'

Two days after the evening at the Haymarket, Mr. Penruth called in South-lane. He had had a box given him for the Olympic, where Robson was delighting everybody in the *Wandering Minstrel*; and he had thought it best to bring the ticket himself. He came at a discreet hour in the afternoon, when Mrs. Trevornock's household duties were over, and she was able to receive him without embarrassment. In the hospitality which was natural to her she was sorely tempted to ask him to tea; but she refrained, lest so homely an invitation should bring discredit on herself and daughters. The delightful institution of afternoon tea—before dinner—was unknown in those days; and to mention tea at five o'clock was a frank confession of *bourgeoisie*. So Mrs. Trevornock, having no wine to offer, offered nothing except the refreshment of a walk round the garden, which Mr. Penruth accepted greedily, having caught a glimpse of two girls in muslin frocks, sitting under the apple-tree.

'It must seem a very poor little garden to you after your

place in Cornwall,' said Mrs. Trevornock, with an apologetic air.

'O, my gardens are nothing particular. I pay very little attention to them. The flowers grow well enough, I believe, though we are nearly a thousand feet above the level of the sea. But I have no taste for horticulture. My sister has her own special garden, and takes a pride in its cultivation; but I don't understand those things. I feel rather bored when she tells me the names of her plants.'

'A sister!' thought Mrs. Trevornock; and she began incontinently to picture to herself a feminine edition of Mr. Penruth.

The girls rose from their low basket-chairs at sight of the visitor.

'Is it not extremely kind of Mr. Penruth?' asked the mother. 'He has brought us a box for the Olympic.'

Barbara said not a word, but Flossie turned cherry-coloured with delight.

'How intensely good of you!' she exclaimed. 'It is the one desire of my life to see Robson.'

'I am very proud to be able to gratify it,' said Mr. Penruth.

He lingered by the apple-tree for a little, trying to get Barbara to talk to him, but with the least possible success. He was favoured, however, with a very free expression of opinion upon various subjects from Flossie, who did her best to atone for her sister's coldness.

'I can't think how you can be so uncivil to the man, when he is heaping favours upon us,' remonstrated Flossie, after Mr. Penruth had taken his departure, and the two girls were alone in the garden.

'I don't want his favours. Can't you see through the whole business?' said Barbara impatiently.

'I am generally pretty clear-sighted.'

'Don't you see that my father wants this man to marry one of us? And he has given him mamma's address, and encouraged him to come here.'

'Well, if he has, it shows a nearer approach to fatherly instinct than he has hitherto displayed,' said Flossie.

'I call it a cruel insult. As if he thought that in our poverty we would be willing to marry any rich man for the sake of his money.'

'We can't both marry him,' said Flossie. 'You are talking arrant nonsense.'

'My father has no right to send this man here.'

'He has a right to look after the interests of his daughters—'

'Yes, after letting them grow up like weeds!' interjected Bab.

'And if he knows of a Cornish millionaire going begging he is quite right in letting us have the refusal of him.'

'O Flossie, you are so frivolous!'

'Better to be frivolous than disagreeable. I suppose you think because you are engaged that nobody else has any right to think of matrimony. I am rather fascinated with the idea of myself as the wife of one of the richest men in Cornwall. I was looking at Cornwall on the map last night. It's very small. I'd rather it had been Yorkshire.'

'Flossie, you never would marry such a man as that?'

'Well, he's not my ideal. But then you see one might waste a lifetime looking for one's ideal. I think it might be better to take the first millionaire that came in one's way.'

Barbara sighed. There was no use in arguing with such a sister as this—a being so utterly unstable, a mere feather on the stream of life, dancing and gyrating with every motion of the tide.

This visit of Vyvyan Penruth's made a note of discord in the family harmony. Mrs. Trevornock and Flossie could talk of nothing but their new acquaintance. They speculated upon the amount of his income. They discoursed sagely about slate-quarries—which must be an inexhaustible source of wealth, seeing how many slated roofs there were in Camberwell alone.

'We are slated ourselves,' said Mrs. Trevornock, alluding to her house. 'Very likely our slates came from Mr. Penruth's quarries.'

They drew fancy pictures of his house, and dwelt much upon its being a thousand feet above the sea-level.

'So airy,' said Mrs. Trevornock.

'So delightful to be able to look down on all the rest of the county,' remarked Flossie.

When the next evening came, Barbara resolutely refused to go to the theatre.

'I don't want to interfere with your pleasure, or Flossie's, dear ma,' she said; 'but I really have a headache, and I expect my Indian letter. I shall be ever so much happier at home.'

'But it will seem so ungracious to Mr. Penruth,' objected her mother.

'I can't help that, mamma; I am under no obligation to be gracious to Mr. Penruth. He has forced his acquaintance upon us.'

'But, my dear, when a man of his age and position takes so much trouble! A client of your father's, too! I'm afraid he'll be disappointed if he should happen to be at the theatre and not see you there.'

'Why should he be disappointed? He will have you and

Flossie. Besides, the box was a free gift. There was no appointment to meet him at the theatre.'

'Of course not, my dear.'

Half an hour later, when Flossie and her mother were trudging to the Waterloo 'bus, Mrs. Trevornock gave utterance to a very decided opinion.

'Flossie,' she said emphatically, 'I consider Barbara's engagement to Captain Leland the greatest misfortune of her life.'

'Why, ma?'

'Because if she had not been engaged to him I'm sure she might have married Mr. Penruth.'

CHAPTER XI.

'LOVE, THOU ART BITTER.'

BARBARA sat reading in the garden in the declining light, very thankful for having been allowed to stay at home. It was a womanly instinct, and not a vain girl's consciousness of her beauty, which had warned her that she was the attraction that drew the Cornishman to South-lane, and had procured this curious concatenation of theatre-tickets and afternoon-calls. She wanted to be true to her absent lover in the smallest acts of her life, and she shrank from accepting attention of any kind from another man.

She thought of the happy evenings last summer, when Captain Leland had taken Flossie and her to the Opera—the lovely music, the lively talk as they drove home. What pleasure could ever be like that?

'I feel as if I had no right to enter a theatre while he is away,' she said to herself.

She was listening for the postman's knock all the time. South-lane was very silent in the summer dusk. She would hear the man's footsteps even in the garden, she thought; yet her impatience would not let her stay out of doors. She went into the front room, and sat on a low couch in the window, watching for the postman's arrival. It was by this post that her Indian letters generally came.

She sat looking through the leafy twilight, and listening absently to the small servant-maid singing 'Home, sweet Home,' in a fresh young voice, not innocent of a country twang. Neither book nor work could occupy her thoughts in this painful hour of expectancy. She could only watch the bend of the lane, just visible between the branches of lime and sycamore. Yes, here came the postman, tramping along with his little load of trouble and joy, as indifferent as Juggernaut.

Bang-bang! went the knocker, as Bab flew into the narrow hall. There was the thin foreign letter lying on the floorcloth. It looked even thinner than usual, miserably scraggy.

Barbara picked it up and put it to her lips, skinny as it was.

'Poor dear, he must have been dreadfully busy,' she said to herself. 'Those accounts worry him so.'

Captain Leland's duties for the last few months had been as exciting as they were laborious. He had been appointed to the command of a Corps of Guides on the frontier, a post at once important and desirable. In one part of his district he was at the head of every department of business, judicial, financial, and military. The finance question had already given him some trouble.

'What a poor little letter!' sighed Barbara, as she went back to her sofa by the window, to make the most of the fading light.

This was what she read :

'Dearest,—I write this to bid you good-bye. Yes, love, there is no other course open to me. Events have happened which make our marriage impossible to me, as a man of honour. A shadow has fallen on my career, so dark, that I would not have the life of the woman I love clouded by it. There would be nothing gained by my entering into details. You would not understand. I do not understand myself how this thing has befallen me.

'God bless you, dear love, and good-bye. I give you back your liberty. If you should be pained, by and by, by hearing evil spoken of me, you will at least be spared the torture of hearing your future husband slandered. I shall be nothing more to you than an old friend, with whom Fate has dealt hardly.—Yours, in friendship and sad despairing love, till death.

'GEORGE LELAND.'

What was she to make of such a letter? She read and re-read it; she sat staring idly at the lines, dazed, bewildered, helpless. That he renounced her, released her from her engagement, flung her off utterly, seemed hideously clear; and so much only could she understand. What could have happened to him to make such an act necessary? The blood mounted to her face in a crimson flood as she thought that one kind of involvement alone, one kind of disgrace alone, could make it incumbent upon him to write such a letter. An entanglement of some kind with another woman could alone force him to break his faith with her.

He forewarned her that she would hear evil things said of him. The scandal, whatever it was, had gone far and wide, then. She felt the sting of his shame; she writhed beneath the burden of his disgrace.

‘O, why could he not tell me all?’ she asked. ‘Why should he be afraid to trust me?’

And then it struck her that the story might be too shameful for him to tell to a woman whose purity he honoured.

She went back to the letter, trying to get at its hidden meaning, if there were anything hidden from her.

Events had happened which made their marriage impossible to him as a man of honour. It was he who drew back. His honour demanded the sacrifice. That seemed final. What could she say against it? Yet something she must say. She could not surrender him and all her hopes of happiness without some protest.

She opened her desk and began to write, though it would be nearly a week before her letter could begin its journey eastward.

‘Your letter has almost broken my heart,’ she wrote. ‘It seems unanswerable, yet I must answer it. You say that your honour forbids our marriage. How can our marriage dishonour you, unless circumstances have arisen that constrain you to marry some one else? O love, if your heart has gone from me, if you have given it to another, the change is cruel in its suddenness. You might have given me warning. I should not have upbraided you for your inconstancy. I would have endured my loss and my sorrow very patiently.

‘If you have ceased to love me and learned to love some one else, you have only to say one little word. Or if you would rather not say even that, I shall take your silence to mean that it is so. Let all the past be as if it had never been. I will think of you only as a friend who once was very dear. But if the shadow you speak of involves you alone, if you still love me, still in your heart of hearts wish me to be your wife, I care nothing for what the world may say of you. I know you well enough, I love you well enough, to believe you against all the world. Good report or evil report will make no difference to me. You may freely, securely, tell me anything evil that has happened to you; and you may be sure that, however dark the story may seem to the eyes of strangers, I shall never doubt that my hero is scathless; I shall never honour or admire my dear love less than I have honoured and admired him from the first. O, trust me, George, trust me, with all your heart!’

She wrote more than this, fondly repeating the same appeal. Nothing could change her love for him, or weaken the tie that bound her to him, so long as he was unchanged to her.

And then when the letter was finished, blotted a little with the hot tears that had rained upon it, Barbara's fortitude gave way utterly, and she buried her face in the sofa-pillow and sobbed out her passion of grief.

It was late by this time. Dreading the return of her mother and sister, loquacious and enthusiastic about the evening's entertainment, Barbara went up-stairs to bed in the summer dusk, which was hardly darkness, too miserable to light her candle, feeling as if the obscurity of night were in some wise a shelter for sorrow.

Lying on her bed of woe, the tears streaming from her tired eyes, she could still hear the servant shrilling in the little kitchen below, like Elaine in her tower :

'Tis the last ROSE OF SUM-MER
Left bloo-oo-ming A-A-A-lone.
All her lover-LY kumpanyuns
Har fa-yer-did and gorn !'

CHAPTER XII.

FLOSSIE GOES TO THE POST.

AFTER the receipt of that letter Barbara fell ill. It was no desperate case of brain-fever. She did not become delirious and rave about her cruel lover. But she was sick and sorry. She lay on her bed, in the sunny little bedroom, and drooped, like a flower that has been plucked ruthlessly from its stem. She could neither eat nor sleep, and she refused to be comforted. For a little while she tried to keep her sorrowful secret. To all Flossie's speculations and interrogatories she was dumb ; but on the third day, when Mrs. Trevornock was sitting by the bed, and the broken-hearted girl lay in those loving arms, her head resting on the maternal breast, the ice broke all at once, and, with tears streaming down her pale cheeks, she told her mother about George Leland's letter.

'My dearest child,' cried the mother, melting into tears, 'how could he be so cruel ! Show me his letter, darling. I can't understand—'

'No, mother, the letter is too sacred. I would show you any other letter from him, but not this one.'

And then she explained falteringly her lover's dark hints of dishonour and disgrace.

'I have written to tell him that no evil judgment of other men could alter my trust in him,' she said. 'I have told him that nothing but a change in his own feelings could make any difference to me.'

Mrs. Trevornock looked alarmed. She was so easily impressed, poor soul, so much a creature of the present moment ; and latterly the idea that Barbara's engagement was in some wise unfortunate had been gaining strength in her mind.

'But, my love, you must not send such a letter as that,' she exclaimed. 'You must not marry a disgraced man. What would your aunt Sophia say? He must have been doing something dreadful. Some gambling transaction, perhaps—young men in India gamble frightfully—or some horrid entanglement with his colonel's wife—young men in India often entangle themselves with their colonels' wives. I have read of such things in novels. Let me write to him darling. It is a mother's duty to write and ask him for an explanation. It is not your place to reply to such a letter. Marry a disgraced man! No, love, you would break my heart if you did that—you who were born to occupy a distinguished position. It would be bad enough for you to marry a poor man; and you know I never quite approved of your engagement.'

'O mother, when you were so fond of George!'

'I liked him, darling; but I never liked the engagement. He would have made a very good husband for Flossie. Let me write to him, dear. Pray don't send that foolish letter.'

'I must, dear mother. This is a matter in which I must act for myself. It is life or death with me.'

The resolute young face, the thoughtful eyes, beautiful in their intense sadness, gave emphasis to her words. This was no fickle soul, blown whithersoever the weathercock of fancy pointed, but a nature in which all the seeds of life took deep root.

Here Flossie, who exercised no authority over her legs when she was excited, came tumbling into the room. In one hand she held a big bunch of loveliest yellow roses and maidenhair fern—both rarer in those days than they are now—in the other a basket of purple grapes, such as one sees in a picture by Lance, or in the shop of the haughty Solomons.

'Look at these, Bab,' gasped Flossie, throwing the roses on to the bed, 'and say if pa's client does not improve on acquaintance. And he wants to know if you will be well enough for the last night of the Italian Opera—the *Hugenots*, at Covent Garden—next Tuesday; and it will be your only chance this year, and I do hope you'll not be such an idiot as to refuse; and he says he's intensely sorry you are ill; and he has got on a black frock-coat and gray trousers, and looks quite civilised; and there's a hansom waiting while he cools his heels in our front parlour and will you go down and see him, ma?'

'I must change my gown first,' said Mrs. Trevornock, looking down at the well-worn garment in which she had been assisting the maid in her morning's house work; for that little house in South-lane was only kept the pink of perfection by means of much labour from mistress as well as maid. 'What shall I say to him, Barbara dear?'

'Anything you like, mother, as long as you don't accept his Opera-tickets for me.'

'What!' cried Flossie, lifting up her eyebrows till they almost touched the roots of her hair, 'do you mean to say you don't want to hear the *Huguenots*, with the new soprano as Valentina?'

'I should dearly love to hear her if I could go to the Opera with people I like—you and mother alone, for instance. But I am not going to the Opera with Mr. Penruth.'

'He doesn't ask you to do anything of the kind. He will only drop into our box.'

'And stay there all the evening, as he did at the Haymarket. It is too dear a price to pay for the enjoyment of a play. Please tell him that I am not well enough to go to theatres, and that if I were I shouldn't care about them.'

'But, my pet,' pleaded her mother, 'you really ought to distract your mind. If you give yourself up to grief in this way you will get seriously ill.'

The girl's unexpressed thought was, 'That would not hurt me. Death would mean release from sorrow.'

'I call it absolute folly,' cried Flossie, with an aggrieved air, when her mother had gone to change her gown. 'Here is a gentleman rolling in money, the dearest wish of whose life is to provide us with amusement; and he is kept waiting in our front parlour in a most inhuman manner—with a cab at ever so much a minute standing at the gate—while a disagreeable young woman turns up her nose at his polite attentions and blights all our chances of enjoyment. I call it disgusting selfishness.'

'I don't want to prevent mamma and you accepting his Opera-tickets, Flossie. You can go to the Opera without me.'

'Of course we can. But when Mr. Penruth finds one member of a small family persistently disagreeable, he will naturally leave off showing kindness to the other members. How am I to thank him for those divine roses and those delicious grapes? They were brought specially for you.'

'Say anything you think proper.'

'Then I shall tell him that you were longing for purple grapes and yellow roses, and that his kindness has anticipated the desire of your soul,' cried Flossie, dancing out of the room almost as wildly as she had tumbled into it.

The next day was the day for the Indian post, and Barbara was still far too ill to go out and post her letter with her own hands, as she would fain have done. She got up, and experimentalised with herself by a walk across the room, and found herself so weak and tremulous that to dream of an excursion to the post-office would have been sheer foolishness. She must employ Flossie in this all-important mission—a frail skiff in

which to trust her fortune; but there was no other. It was Saturday, and for Mrs. Trevornock to leave her house on the last day of the week was a thing unknown. That excellent house-keeper, indeed, was at all times, more or less, a slave to domesticity, and was loth to intrust her eight-roomed dwelling to the doubtful custody of a servant.

'You'll take the greatest care of my letter, won't you, darling?' asked Barbara, when she had put the sacred charge into Flossie's hands.

'Goodness gracious, child! Yes, of course. You know I am the very essence of carefulness, and the only woman of business in this house,' cried Flossie, admiring her fresh young face as she tied her bonnet-strings before the looking-glass.

Then Flossie danced down-stairs to the kitchen to get her mother's commissions to the Walworth-road, which, the day being Saturday, were more numerous than usual.

Flossie was to look in at the butcher's, and make a special request that the Sunday joint should not be too fat, nor weigh more than seven pounds at the uttermost. She was to call at the buttermilk's, and order half a pound of best fresh, and sixpenny-worth of breakfast eggs. She was to ask the baker to send a particular kind of fancy loaf for Sunday's consumption. She was to buy ever so many small articles at the grocer's, and bring them home in her reticule, as that grocer's errand-boy was a creature as tricky and uncertain as Robin Goodfellow. She was to order a pound of composites at the oil-and-colour shop, and she was to call at the circulating library for the first volume of Bulwer's last novel, to comfort Barbara in her sickness.

'Hadn't you better write the things down?' suggested Mrs. Trevornock, who was making pastry at the little table by the vine-wreathed window. 'It's a good deal for you to remember.'

'Providence has blessed me with a tolerable memory,' said Flossie. 'Now, ma, the sinews of war, please. Look sharp! I've a letter to post for Bab, and it must be in by four o'clock.'

'O,' said Mrs. Trevornock, looking grave, as she fumbled with a floury hand in her pocket for the money, 'her Indian letter?'

'Yes, her Indian letter.'

Mrs. Trevornock sighed as she counted her little stock of silver.

'I hope Barbara is not going to be poor all her days, like me,' she said. 'One's life seems such a long journey when one has to calculate the cost of every step. I should like my darling to marry a rich man.'

'So should I,' said Flossie; 'if it were only for the sake of poor me.'

Flossie on her perambulations on a fine summer afternoon

was a creature to observe and study, a being of the butterfly species altogether, yet with a certain stratum of sound sense under her butterfly frivolity. The fact that she had business on hand was never absent from her mind; yet she contrived to get as much amusement as she could on her way. She looked her prettiest on these occasions—her bonnet neatly put on, her bonnet-strings a picture; her gloves, in their small way, perfection; her muslin gown brightened by a ribbon just where a dash of colour was needed. People looked at her and admired her as she went by; but no one ever doubted that she was a young lady. The days of that half-world which lies between respectability and the disreputable had not yet come. Powder and paint and darkened eyebrows were the livery of a race outside the pale. There was no compromise between virtue and vice in that simpler epoch.

It was astonishing what a large amount of amusement Flossie was able to derive from the contemplation of shop-windows which she saw nearly every day. Looking at shops with Flossie was almost a passion. She stopped to gaze into the most insignificant windows. The scent-bottles and pomatum-pots and packets of court-plaster at the chemist's; the Berlin-wool patterns at the fancy shop; the toys, the trumpery, the sham jewelry, the Brummagem brooches, tinsel bracelets, all interested her. But these were as nothing compared with a display of bonnets, gloves, ribbons, parasols, and French flowers at elevenpence three-farthings the spray. Over these she gloated for ten minutes at a stretch, trying to make up her mind what she would buy when she had a half-sovereign to spend for herself. To-day she was in a particularly volatile humour. Mr. Penruth's theatre-tickets had demoralised her. She was thinking of Robson; she was forecasting the bliss of an Italian opera. She found it harder than usual to fix her mind on butcher's-meat and grocery. She fluttered past the butcher's shop, on the wings of her muslin frock, forgetting that she had a message to deliver there, and fluttered back again conscience-stricken from the other side of Addington-square. She had not her usual grasp of the situation at the grocer's, and blundered about the quarter of a pound of orange pekoe which was to perfume the family teapot. Her ideas were disarranged. Slate-quarries and old Cornish mansions a thousand feet above the sea-level mixed themselves with the daily humdrum of fancy bread and lump-sugar. She found herself speculating upon what might have been her fate had Mr. Penruth been attracted by her charms instead of Barbara's; whether she could ever have brought herself to look over his awkwardness of gait and figure, and to accept the mansion and the quarries.

She had decided that these drawbacks were not unconquer-

able, and she was already in imagination reigning over the Cornish household and riding thoroughbred horses over the Cornish moors, when she pulled herself up suddenly at the post-office, and came down with a tremendous drop from the airy realms of fancy to the solid world of fact.

'Gracious!' she exclaimed inwardly, 'Barbara's letter!'

Barbara's letter! Where was Barbara's letter? The joy or woe of two lives hangs upon that sheet of flimsy paper. The fate of two strong and steadfast souls has been trusted to this butterfly creature, and the result is ruin.

Flossie searched her reticule and turned her pocket inside out in vain. The letter was gone. She turned hastily and hurried back over so far, perusing the pavement with her eyes. In vain. She asked the most unlikely people if they had picked up a letter. She looked down the gratings before her favourite shop-windows; she went back to the baker's, the butcher's, the grocer's, and fluttered those respectable tradespeople by her eager inquiries; but there was no trace of Barbara's letter. That message of faithful love, that fond despairing appeal to a lover's heart, had disappeared as completely from Camberwell as if the winds of heaven had taken pity upon the writer and wafted it away to the Indian seas.

'What shall I do?' thought Flossie, standing on the pavement, staring wildly round in an agony of remorse. 'Barbara would never forgive me, if she knew how careless I have been.'

But Barbara ought to know, and Barbara could easily write another letter, argued reason; and Flossie went slowly homewards, framing the apologetic speech in which she should confess her sin.

She felt deeply humiliated. She, who had been wont to assert herself as the one business-like individual in the family, to be thus convicted of dire carelessness! Where henceforward would be her pretensions? She had yielded the palm to Barbara in beauty and in intellectual acquirement, but she had asserted herself always as the sole proprietor of practical wisdom. She walked slowly into the sunshiny kitchen—where Mrs. Trevornock was setting the teatray, while Amelia hearthstoned the back premises with a view to all-pervading spotlessness on the coming Sabbath—and sank exhausted into a chair by the open window, where the vine, which never in its life had grown an eatable grape, pushed in its leaves and tendrils so prettily. She had a guilty look, which struck her mother at once.

'I hope you haven't forgotten anything,' cried Mrs. Trevornock, as she warmed the teapot.

'No, ma dear.'

'You called at the butcher's?'

'Yes.'

'And you have brought the pekoe, and a teacake for Barbara's tea?'

'Yes; here's the teacake. I'll toast it if you like.'

'No; you look tired, and you're as pale as a ghost. Was it very warm out of doors?'

'It was—for me. It's no use trying to hide it, mother,' cried Flossie, in a gush of candour; 'I've done something dreadful.'

'You've lost my change!' exclaimed Mrs. Trevornock, horror-stricken.

'Change, indeed!' cried Flossie; 'why, there was only sevenpence-halfpenny left after I'd paid for everything. It's much worse than that.'

'You horrid girl, how you are torturing me!' said the aggrieved mother, letting the kettle boil over unheeded, to the detriment of a newly whitened hearth. 'For mercy's sake speak out, and have done with it!'

'I've lost Barbara's Indian letter.'

'Lost it?'

'Yes; I must have dropped it into an area, or let it fly away into the clouds. It's gone.'

Mrs. Trevornock looked fully alive to the enormity of the offence, but she answered not a word. Profound thoughtfulness took possession of her. She had just enough consciousness of common things to snatch up the kettle, which was now making a Great Geyser of itself, and to fill the teapot; but, for the rest, her thoughts were far away.

'You might say something sympathetic, ma,' observed Flossie, aggrieved by this silence; 'I shall have a nice scolding from Bab. Her inmost thoughts banded up and down the Walworth-road and circulated all over Camberwell! I'm sure I don't know how ever I shall bring myself to tell her.'

Mrs. Trevornock sat down, and looked at her daughter doubtfully.

'Suppose you were not to say anything about it, Flora?' she said.

'Why, then poor George Leland would be languishing for a letter—'

'Flossie,' interrupted Mrs. Trevornock solemnly, 'there are reasons why it would be much better for Barbara that Captain Leland never got that letter. I don't mind trusting you, for you have plenty of common sense, and know how to look at things in a practical way.'

'Well, ma, I am not ridiculously romantic, like Bab; and though I am only eighteen, I have some knowledge of the world.'

'An enormous amount for so young a girl,' said Mrs. Trevornock approvingly. 'Well, dear, I am sorry to say poor Captain

Leland, who was always so gentlemanlike and so kind, and whom I really loved, has got into some dreadful trouble—whether it is gambling or something worse, I don't know, and Heaven only knows how it may end—and he has had the proper feeling to write to Barbara, releasing her from her engagement—'

'Very nice in him,' said Flossie. 'And that is why Barbara has been breaking her heart?'

'Yes, poor darling child! And, in spite of all I could say, she has been foolish enough to write and tell him that nothing can change her love for him, and that she will be true to him through evil report and good report—'

'And that is the letter I have managed to lose!' cried Flossie, jumping up, and executing her favourite *pas seul* round the kitchen. 'Why, what a clever girl I am! I really thought I had been stupid for once in my life, and behold, my stupidity was a stroke of genius! Give me your benediction, mother. Bab shall marry the slate-quarries, and you and I will walk in silk attire all the rest of our lives.'

'Flora, Flora, how wild you are!'

'I am only pleased with my unconscious ingenuity. To think that I, who never lost a letter before in my life, should go and lose just that one! I sha'n't say one word to Bab. The Captain will think she accepts his release, and he will consider the engagement at an end. And Barbara will be Mrs. Penruth, and one of the richest women in Cornwall; and all my doing! And now let me toast the teacake, and get her tray ready. Poor dear pet, she shall have a nice tea!'

And the mother and sister, who were dealing with Barbara's fate as if they were wiser than Providence, and knew better how to regulate life and its chances, thought they were making some amends for their duplicity by small attentions and trivial tender-nesses, such as are given to a sick child as compensation for weary hours and nauseous medicines.

CHAPTER XIII.

SILENCE.

HER letter on its way to India, as she supposed, Barbara began to count the days which must pass before she could receive her lover's reply; and the fond expectation of this answer, which would doubtless reward her faith by the assurance of George Leland's unchanged and unchangeable love, cheered and comforted her. She revived and bloomed again, like a flower which has bent to the storm, and seemed almost the old, bright, happy

Barbara in the small family circle ; whereat her mother and Flossie concluded that the barb had never gone deep into her heart, that she had liked Captain Leland only because he was at hand to be liked, and that she had a stock of affection ready to be transferred to a more worthy object.

A blank and monotonous tranquillity characterised the period of falling leaves and fading flowers in South-lane. The angular Cornishman had gone back to his moor and his slate-quarries, disgusted by Barbara's incivility, no doubt, as Flossie remarked complainingly on several occasions.

'The very first influential friend we ever had,' grumbled the damsel, 'and Bab must needs make herself disagreeable to him. A man who could get endless orders for the theatres.'

'I feel convinced that he has no more influence at the theatres than you have, Flossie,' protested Barbara. 'He bought all those tickets.'

'All the more to his credit if he did. It proves that he has a generous disposition, and that he ought to be cultivated. Yet you must needs snub him shamefully. And now he has gone back to Cornwall, and we shall never see him again.'

'I devoutly hope we sha'n't,' said Bab.

But in this hope Barbara was disappointed, as in that fonder hope of a speedy reply from her lover. The year waned ; the leafy groves of Camberwell grew bleak and bare ; the friendly muffin-man loomed through the mists of afternoon ; the yellow gaslight flared against a background of brown fog, and Mrs. Trevornock's parlours put on their cosy winter aspect. The sofa was wheeled to the fireside ; the round table drawn nearer the hearth ; the wide French window shrouded with warm curtains ; and a sense of homeliness and comfort and love and union grew stronger with the lengthening of the winter nights, since darkness and the shutting out of the external world seemed to draw mother and daughters, and even the faithful and melodious serving-maid, nearer together.

Yet there was a discordant note in their music. Barbara was not herself ; Barbara, bravely though she bore her trouble, was evidently unhappy. No answer had come to her letter—that frank and generous letter, in which she had, as it were, flung herself into her lover's arms, thrown herself almost at his feet, setting at naught the world and the world's good word for his sake. There had been plenty of time for his reply, but he had not answered her. Barbara accepted his silence as the admission of his inconstancy. His heart had gone from her. It would have been useless, painful, perhaps, for him to reply to her letter. What could he say ? 'My dear, you are very generous, and I thank you for the assurance of your love. Unhappily I have fallen in love with some one else, and am only embarrassed by your

amiable constancy.' No, it was better for him to leave her foolish letter unanswered, since he could say nothing which would not be more or less discreditable to him and humiliating to her.

So while he was the real offender, her shame and remorse were as profound as if the sin had been hers. She despised herself for having written that letter. She ought to have accepted the annulment of her engagement without a word. He had wished to be free, and he had told her so. Her place was to have bowed to his decision. All those fine phrases in which he had enveloped the one plain fact of his inconstancy meant nothing, and she ought to have so understood them.

'I was very foolish; I knew so little of the world,' she told herself, in deep abasement. 'And he seemed so fond of me; we were so happy. I thought he loved me as intensely as I loved him. How could I tell that his love would last such a short time? How pale he was that day on the ship, when he held me to his heart as if he could not part with me! His eyes had a despairing look. If that was not love, true faithful love— O God, was it only seeming? Can he hold another woman to his heart, look into other eyes, and in one short year—'

These were Barbara's thoughts in many a solitary walk up and down the narrow gravel path in the bare wintry garden. She liked to be alone with her trouble, and had taken to avoiding Flossie's society. She had to fight with her great grief, and conquer it, if she could. She had abandoned all hope of a reply to her letter. There could be no delay in such a matter. A letter of that kind must be answered at once, or not at all. She made up her mind that all was ended between her and George Leland. If they were ever to meet again, it would be as strangers. They would pass each other in the street, perhaps, without a word, with only one swift glance of horrified recognition, and then carefully averted eyes.

'O my love, I have loved you so! I thought you so entirely my own!' she said to herself. 'I thought we were to live and die together, and lie side by side in the grave. And now it is all over and ended, and you look back perhaps and wonder how you could ever have liked me.'

Mrs. Trevornock and Flossie were more than usually affectionate and considerate in their treatment of Barbara, but neither dared to intrude upon her grief. Flossie affected an abnormal gaiety, and made occasional sprightly allusions to the man in Cornwall, his estates, and his Opera-tickets, and his evident admiration of Barbara; but these being received by her sister with an icy coldness, she was not encouraged to enlarge upon the theme. Neither mother nor daughter breathed Captain Leland's name. They knew they had done wrong, yet they hugged them-

selves in the belief that they had been guilty of a very small evil in order to bring about a very large good. Barbara's pallid cheeks and heavy eyes were an ever-present reproach, but her cheek might have been as pale and her eye as dull if her letter had been duly posted; for who could tell what trouble the Captain's reply might have brought her? And to sanction her marriage with a disgraced man would have been to doom her to pale cheeks and careworn looks for the rest of her life. Desperate ills must have desperate remedies. Mrs. Trevornock felt that she had done her duty as a mother in concealing the loss of the letter.

Youth and health are possessions not easily squandered. Before the winter was half over Barbara began to recover, physically, from the blow that had fallen so heavily on heart and mind. She had not ceased to grieve in silence; she was not less unhappy; but the bloom came back to her cheek and the lustre to her eye. She was more like the old Barbara in that pre-Adamite period of life before the idea of a partial boarder had entered Mrs. Trevornock's mind. She was able to smile at Flossie's pertness; she was loving and companionable as of old with mother and sister.

Peace was restored to the family circle.

CHAPTER XIV.

A HANDSOME OFFER.

JUST at this time, when London days were shortest, and London fogs thickest, the gaunt Cornishman reappeared in South-lane. He dropped in one December day between the lights, when Mrs. Trevornock and her daughters were sitting by the cosy fire, chattering gaily in the leisure interval when it was too dark to work and too early for candles and tea. He had come up for the Cattle Show, he informed Mrs. Trevornock when he had shaken hands with the three ladies—not because he cared about such things, but only because a neighbour of his, living within twenty miles or so of Penruth Place, was coming, and wanted his company.

'I'm glad you don't care about looking at poor ill-used over-fed beasts,' said Flossie. 'You would have sunk in my estimation if you had. I'm sure no client of pa's would have such bad taste.'

'By the bye, how is Mr. Trevornock?' inquired the client. 'I only came to London last night, and haven't had time to call upon him.'

The mother and daughters glanced at each other in serio-comic embarrassment. It was nearly two months since either of the girls had seen her father, and then Flossie had paid him a solitary visit, Barbara keeping aloof, lest she should hear her faithless lover abused.

'Our parent was in excellent health when we last heard of him,' Flossie answered boldly.

Mr. Penruth sat in his corner between the fireplace and the folding-doors, and said very little. He did not shine in conversation; and on this occasion he flung the responsibility of entertaining him upon his hostess and her daughters. He could just see Barbara's clear-cut face in the firelight, and it was sufficient pleasure for him to sit there and contemplate her beauty. Flossie watched him from her place in the shadow behind her sister.

'I suppose Cornwall was looking very wintry when you left?' said Mrs. Trevornock.

'It was bleak and dreary; but we rarely have snow so far west.'

'How nice!'

'Yes, it's a pleasant climate, if you don't mind a good deal of rain.'

'I adore rain,' cried Flossie, determined to be civil. 'It's so cool, and clean, and refreshing.'

'Are you near the sea?' inquired Mrs. Trevornock, casting about in her mind for any stray crumb of conversation to offer a man of whose surroundings and character she was painfully ignorant.

'Seven or eight miles.'

'Too far for a walk, unless one were a very good walker,' speculated Mrs. Trevornock.

'I often walk to the coast.'

'Ah, then you are a good walker.'

'My quarries are on the way to the sea. I go there sometimes on business.'

His quarries! Flossie and her mother thrilled at the word. It was the first time he had mentioned the quarries in their hearing.

'Do you attend to the qu-quarries yourself?' faltered Mrs. Trevornock, obliged to make her conversation interrogative, since the man gave her so little assistance.

'Not entirely. My brother Mark does the greater part of the work. He is manager—pays the men, keeps the books, writes letters—an excellent man of business.'

'What a comfort for you!' ejaculated Mrs. Trevornock gushingly.

'Yes; I don't know what I should do without Mark. I hate pens and ink. I like walking or riding about my land and look-

ing after that : but the superintendence of the quarries would be a nuisance to me ; and I shouldn't like to trust a stranger.'

'And your sister?' pursued Mrs. Trevornock, feeling that the conversation was getting interesting, and that her guest was warming a little. 'What a comfort she must be to you!'

'She keeps my house,' replied Mr. Penruth curtly ; and the talk came to a dead stop.

Mrs. Trevornock had been carrying on a little argument with herself all the time she talked. She wanted her tea desperately, so no doubt did those dear girls. And Mr. Penruth evidently was in no hurry to go. She ought to offer him some kind of refreshment, and she had nothing but tea to offer. She must face the situation boldly.

'We are just going to have tea,' she began modestly, 'and I should like to ask you to join us ; but of course you dine late, and—'

'I dine at any time I find convenient, when I am away from home,' answered Penruth. 'I had some cold beef at Baker-street in the middle of the day. I shall be very glad to take tea with you.'

Lowly-minded creature! The owner of lands and quarries to confess so simply to a snack of cold beef and bread, washed down perhaps by unpretending beer!

'That's very friendly of you,' said Mrs. Trevornock ; and then she rang the bell with a grand air, intending to slip out of the room before the tray was brought, to see that everything was in perfect order.

'Have you been to the theatres lately?' asked Mr. Penruth, when he was alone with the two girls.

'No,' sighed Flossie. 'We have not many friends like you, with the *entrée* to all the theatres and the disposition to give us pleasure.'

'Then I hope you will allow me to send you some tickets before I leave town. Is there anything you particularly wish to see?'

Flossie named three plays, to see any one of which would be rapture.

'And you, Miss Trevornock?' asked the Cornishman, determined to extort speech of some kind from this beautiful statue. 'Is there nothing you wish to see at all the London theatres?'

'No,' answered Barbara, 'I don't care about theatres.'

'Now you know, Barbara, that is not true,' cried Flossie ; 'only a year or so ago you doted on plays. You were never happier than when you were at a play or an opera.'

'Times change and people too,' said Bab ; 'I am quite different now.'

'So early tired of the pleasures of life!' exclaimed Mr. Penruth; 'that is almost a miracle.'

'Some people tire sooner than others, perhaps,' said Bab gravely. 'I have had enough pleasure of that kind.'

'Well, I shall send the tickets, and I hope your mother and sister will tempt you to go with them.'

Mrs. Trevornock returned, and the teatray was brought in immediately afterwards—the most delicate bread-and-butter, a shining teapot, the best cups and saucers—a general air of elegance which Flossie felt was too good for that rough-looking Cornishman, however rich and great he might be in his own county.

They sat round the fire and drank strong tea, and seemed as friendly a party as in the vanished days, when George Leland had sat where Mr. Penruth was sitting now. But O, how different their talk was! In those old days everybody had had too much to say. There had been laughter and frolic; grave talk of that distant Indian world which the soldier knew so well; talk of men and of books, of art, poetry, music; mere nonsense talk also, the overflow of happy minds unburdened by a care. To night it was up-hill work to maintain any kind of conversation. Barbara would take no trouble; Flossie's pert chatter sounded out of tune; the Cornishman lapsed into silence after every little spurt of communicativeness.

'I don't think I could endure life with such a dull man,' mused Flossie, 'if he were ever so rich: unless I could be the kind of wife one reads about in fashionable novels, who only meets her husband, by accident, once or twice a week on the stairs.'

Mr. Penruth stayed till nine o'clock, and seemed unconscious that time hung heavily in his society. He said what he wanted to say, and no more. He looked at Barbara; he smiled grimly once or twice at Flossie's impertinences; he was civil, and even courteous, in his wooden way, to Mrs. Trevornock. For the rest, he seemed a creature hewn clumsily out of a block of wood—a being without feelings or sentiments, or the capacity for intense passion, whether of grief or anger, or love or hate.

'I shall be stopping in town for a week or so,' he said, when he had risen to take leave, 'and I shall call again some afternoon, if you won't consider me an intruder.'

An intruder? As if the owner of lands and quarries could intrude! Mrs. Trevornock declared that she and her daughters would be flattered and delighted by Mr. Penruth's visits.

'O mother, how dull he is!' cried Flossie, with a desperate yawn, when Amelia had opened the hall-door for the visitor, and the winter night had swallowed him up. 'What a weary evening it has been!'

‘Nonsense, Flossie ; he has lived a great deal in the country, and he is of a retiring disposition. But I am sure he is clever ; I can see it in his forehead.’

‘There’s a good deal of bumpiness above his eyebrows ; but he is the dullest man I ever met. Certainly Captain Leland is the only other man I know much about, and I must say that any comparison between the two is vastly to Mr. Penruth’s disadvantage.’

Mrs. Trevornock rewarded her daughter with an awful frown. Bab had gone into the next room, and was playing to herself softly in the glimmer of light that came through the half-open folding-door, playing one of Mendelssohn’s saddest melodies.

‘Mother,’ whispered Flossie, ‘I’m afraid it will never do. Bab can’t bear him. Don’t ask her to marry him.’

‘Why, Flossie, what nonsense you talk ! How do we know he is going to make her an offer ? Do you think I would urge a child of mine to marry against her own inclination ? But I should like to see Barbara in a grand position. I think she was born for it. She would adorn any circle ; she would be a noble mistress for a fine old house.’

‘Like that house on the Cornish moors. If she could only forget her Captain !’

‘She has seemed happier lately ; quite her old self.’

‘On the surface. But I’m afraid she has not left off regretting him.’

This conversation was carried on in whispers while that pathetic strain of Mendelssohn’s rose and fell in the next room. Poor Mrs. Trevornock went to bed sorely distressed in mind. She loved her daughter with a passionate love, capable of self-sacrifice in the highest degree. Her ambitious views did not include one selfish desire. That a rich marriage for Barbara would insure prosperity for herself, peace and security for her declining years, hardly entered into her thoughts. She wanted Barbara to have wealth and honour ; she wanted Barbara’s beauty to win some great prize in the lottery of fortune. Bravely as she had confronted the difficulties of life on a very small income, she had a thorough appreciation of the difference between wealth and poverty. She knew how hard it was to be harassed by sordid cares, to have to contrive and study ways and means unceasingly in order to eke out a scanty pittance and keep clear of debt. It would be bliss to her to see her favourite child lifted at once and for ever from this dismal swamp of poverty.

‘And how much she could do for poor little Flossie !’ thought the mother ; ‘there would be a home for her always in Cornwall, if Barbara were married to Mr. Penruth. And, by and by, when I am dead and gone—

Reflections of this kind occupied most of Mrs. Trevornock's waking hours after that visit of Vyvyan Penruth's. It was very clear to her that he had fallen desperately in love with Barbara, wooden as he was. Tickets for the most fashionable theatres rained upon the little family after that December evening. Barbara at first refused to go, and only yielded at sight of her mother's tears.

'If you set your face against all pleasure and amusement you will make me absolutely miserable,' remonstrated Mrs. Trevornock.

'Then I will go, mother. I will do nothing to make you miserable.'

So Barbara went, and enjoyed the play, escaping for a little while from the sad world of her own thoughts.

'Why should I not try to be happy?' she argued with herself. 'He is happy, no doubt, with his last new love. Let me imitate him, and learn to forget.'

Mr. Penruth was always in attendance. He sat at the back of the box, and pretended to be interested in the play, of which he only obtained a diagonal and strictly limited view; he conducted the ladies to a cab, for which he made a point of paying, and he was so liberal in his payment as to secure unbounded civility from the cabman.

'It is very nice to be paid for in this way,' said Flossie; 'but I think Mr. Penruth shows a little too plainly that he knows we are poor.'

'How can he help knowing that,' exclaimed Barbara bitterly, 'when he knows our father?'

'He may be deceived as to papa's character, and believe him a most estimable man,' retorted Flossie.

Mr. Penruth stayed in London nearly a month, came often to South-lane, and saw Mrs. Trevornock and her daughters several times at the theatre. He became as intimate with them as it was in his nature to be with any one; and they grew used to him and his ungainly bearing, his wooden ways. He seemed to them dull and harmless—a man not easily pleased or easily offended, but once impressed, impressed deeply. His admiration of Barbara was as respectful as it was undisguised. He talked of going back to the west daily, yet did not go. He had apparently very little reason for remaining in London, except the pleasure he derived from his visits to South-lane.

On the day before that which he had finally fixed for his return, Barbara received a brief note from her father; an event of such rare occurrence as to cause much wonderment in the small family circle.

'Dear Barbara,—Come and see me to-morrow at twelve,

without your sister. I want to talk to you about a very serious matter.—Yours affectionately,
T. T.'

'Without your sister!' exclaimed Flossie. 'What a base return for my attentions! Life must have taken an extraordinary turn for papa to want to see either of us. His inclination generally points the other way.'

Mrs. Trevornock and Flossie both looked at Barbara. Barbara sat with the open letter in her hand, her eyelids lowered, and a resolute expression about her set lips. Flossie and her mother glanced at each other significantly. They had a shrewd suspicion as to the subject of the interview which Mr. Trevornock asked for.

'You'll go, dear, of course,' said Mrs. Trevornock.

'I suppose I must, mother.'

'Yes, dear. I wish Flossie were not excluded. But she can go as far as Gray's Inn with you, and wait for you at a pastrycook's.'

'I hate waiting at a pastrycook's!' ejaculated Flossie. 'It is the most abominable thing in life. One feels oneself an encumbrance directly one has eaten one's bun. And after one has read the playbills there is nothing to divert one's mind.'

'Barbara cannot go to town alone,' said Mrs. Trevornock.

'No. I suppose I must play propriety. To-morrow in papa's letter means to-day. We have only time to dress and start.'

At eleven the two girls were on their way to Gray's Inn. It was a cold bright morning, and they decided upon walking the whole way, always glad to husband the mother's scanty store. It was like the widow's cruse of oil or the manna in the desert, just enough and nothing over. The slender purse had never failed yet, but had often been on the very edge of emptiness.

The sisters had never talked together so freely as of old since the sudden end of Barbara's engagement. They seldom spoke of Mr. Penruth, save when Flossie broke out into enthusiastic praise of his liberality, and then Barbara was resolutely silent.

'I wonder what papa can have to say to you?' Flossie speculated, as they crossed Blackfriars Bridge—that old bridge, which was narrow and crowded and dirty, and which led by a dingy Farringdon-street to a hilly Holborn.

'Ah, what, indeed!' said Barbara carelessly.

'You don't seem a bit interested.'

'Why should I be interested? He can tell me nothing that will make me happy.'

'Perhaps some one has left you a fortune.'

'That is as probable as the play we saw last night.'

'Ah, if things would only happen as pleasantly in real life as they do in the fifth act of a play!' sighed Flossie.

Barbara left her companion at a dismal little confectioner's in Holborn, a shop where Flossie might sit for half an hour with very little fear of being seen by many people. The girls had refreshed themselves with buns there often on their way from their father's office, and the woman who kept the shop was well disposed towards them.

Mr. Maulford opened the door, just as if he had been on the watch for Barbara. He devoured her face with his great red-brown eyes, eager to read the secrets of her soul.

'You are quite a stranger, Miss Trevornock,' he said, 'and I am sorry to see you not looking so well as when we last met.'

'Is my father at home?'

'Yes; and expecting you. Mr. Penruth was here yesterday afternoon.'

He opened the door, and a voice from within called 'Barbara.'

For the first time since Bab could remember, her father rose to welcome her, and kissed her with some semblance of affection, instead of allowing himself to be kissed with his usual business-like air.

'Sit down, my dear. How pale you are looking! Aren't you well?'

'Pretty well, thank you, papa.'

'Mother well?'

'Very well.'

'Any news from the west?'

'Ma had a letter from aunt Sophia the week before last.'

'Humph! She was well, I suppose?'

'She had just had one of her nervous attacks.'

'Nervous fiddlesticks! If she had to work for her living as I do we should hear nothing of nervous attacks. Stuff and nonsense!'

Barbara contemplated her catskin muff. Mr. Trevornock trimmed his favourite nail.

'Well, my dear, I've some good news for you.'

'I'm very glad of that.'

'I hear from Flora that everything is off between you and Captain What's-his-name.'

'Captain Leland. Yes; all is ended between us.'

'Very wise on both sides. It would have been a wretched marriage for you. I told you so at the time. I have received an offer for your hand, Barbara, from a gentleman of old family and of great wealth. Of course you know whom I mean. Mr. Penruth has behaved in the most straightforward manner. He came to me yesterday afternoon, told me in his plain-sailing way

that he had fallen desperately in love with you; had admired and loved you from the first day he saw you, by accident, in this office—a lucky accident for you, by Jove! He asked my permission to make you an offer; and he told me what he would do for you if your answer were favourable.'

'How do you mean, papa?'

'I mean that he is prepared to make a splendid settlement. He knows what a hard fight I have had—that my practice is hardly good enough to enable me to keep an office over my head and a decent coat on my back—and that your mother is chiefly dependent on my relations for her income. He offers to settle an estate worth six hundred a year upon you. You could afford to give your mother three, and yet be rich enough to gratify every fancy and extravagance a young woman need indulge in. Six hundred a year! I have never been able to earn as much by my profession, toil as I might. And you would have six hundred a year pin-money—money you could spend how you pleased and on whom you pleased. I hope you consider that a generous offer.'

'I do, papa; a very generous offer. Six hundred a year as the price of a penniless girl. It is a splendid offer.'

'I should think so. Do you know the capital required to produce six hundred a year, even at five per cent?—and this would be derived from land, which produces less than three.'

'Without any elaborate calculation I should say twelve thousand pounds,' answered Barbara coldly. 'I had' no idea that anybody would ever think me worth twelve thousand pounds.'

'But that is not all. I have no doubt I could induce him to make a settlement giving you the greater part of his estate after his death, supposing he died childless; if you had children, of course your eldest son would inherit the bulk of the property.'

'Don't enter into details, papa. I am quite ready to acknowledge Mr. Penrith's generosity; but as I cannot accept his offer it is not worth while talking any more about it.'

'You cannot accept!' cried Mr. Trevornock angrily. 'Are you a fool or a madwoman? Do you understand what you are refusing?'

'Perfectly.'

'Great God!' cried the solicitor, bursting with indignation, 'was there ever such folly! Here is a penniless girl, a girl dependent on the benevolence of aunts and uncles who may die to-morrow; a girl who has nothing to look forward to but the workhouse; and she coolly refuses one of the richest men in Cornwall—a man who worships the ground she walks on, and is ready to make the most liberal provision for her future! I—I—I am——' here Mr. Trevornock descended to unpolite language—'if I ever heard of such outrageous stupidity!'

'I daresay I am very stupid,' Barbara answered coldly, 'and that if I were wise I should marry a man I do not love, and perjure myself at God's altar.'

'Nobody asks you to love him. All you have to do is to marry him, and do your duty by him as a virtuous wife; and I should think that ought to come easy to any well-brought-up young woman.'

'It would not come easy to me; and I will not make my life a lie for all the good that wealth could bring me and mine.'

'A nice daughter!' ejaculated Mr. Trevornock; 'a piece of pampered selfishness! Your mother may work her fingers to the bone—she and your sister may starve or beg in the streets—for all you care.'

'I care more than you do, at the worst, father,' said Barbara, confronting him with steady eyes. 'If they have to starve or beg, I shall starve or beg with them.'

'You might make them happy and comfortable for life, you—consummate minx!' cried the outraged parent, choking for want of words forcible enough to express his anger. 'Don't let you or your sister come to me any more for money, mind that! Don't let me hear any of your cursed whining about water-rates or new bonnets. If you come plaguing me any more I'll pitch you both out of window!'

'Very well, papa. Henceforward we will try to exist without the few pounds your generosity has bestowed upon us.'

'As for your impertinent sister,' cried the solicitor, lashing himself into a fury, 'don't let her show her face here. The sight of her makes me sick.'

'She shall not trouble you.'

'If I hear that you are all in the workhouse I sha'n't care a ——.'

'Good-bye, father,' said Barbara on the threshold.

Mr. Maulford darted from his lurking place to open the outer door for her, and to make a second perusal of her countenance. There were no tears in the proud eyes. The face was marble white, and calm as marble.

'You look faint,' said the artful clerk, lingering with his hand upon the latch; 'let me get you a little water.'

'No, thank you; I am quite well. Open the door, please.'

Mr. Maulford reluctantly obeyed, looking at Barbara with a familiar compassionateness which made her detest him a little more than usual.

Half-way down the stairs she met Mr. Penruth coming up. He took both her hands; he looked at her inquiringly, with as much anxiety as his rugged face could express.

'You have seen your father,' he said. 'Has he told you?'

'He has told me the honour you have done me. I—I—'

sorry I should have been so unlucky as to win your regard, for I cannot return it.'

'O Barbara, why answer so quickly?'

'Because I am quite sure of myself. If I were to deliberate for a year I could make no other answer.'

'I will not accept such a hasty decision. I shall wait till you change your mind.'

'That will never happen. Please let go my hands. I have no doubt that you are, as my father tells me, all that is good and generous; but I can never be more to you than I am to-day.'

'I shall wait,' answered Vyvyan Penruth, looking at her with a severe earnestness under the shadow of projecting iron-gray brows; 'the time may come when you will feel the helplessness of your position, and be glad of a strong man's love.'

'Good-morning,' said Barbara, as he reluctantly released her hands.

CHAPTER XV.

'THE LOVE WHICH MAKETH ALL THINGS FOND AND FAIR.'

It is a hard thing to have those you love against you, and this was what Barbara had to bear after her interview with her father. She was obliged to tell her mother and Flossie the gist of that conversation; and they knew that she had refused the finest estate in Cornwall, and an independent income of six hundred a year. It seemed hard, and almost incomprehensible to them, that she should have so acted. Flossie and her mother held long conferences together on the subject. They were never tired of expatiating upon Barbara's folly. They loved her not the less because she was so foolish; the mother's heart yearned towards her as of old. But mother and sister were alike convinced that she was flinging away a life of happiness for the sake of indulging vain regrets for a man who had, by his own admission, proved unworthy of her love. She was sacrificing the real good of existence to an empty dream.

'Six hundred a year!' exclaimed Flossie,—'six hundred a year for pocket-money! Twice the income we have to pay for everything, down to the chimney-sweep: for even *he* is too selfish to sweep a chimney for nothing, though I believe the soot is worth ever so much to him! Six hundred a year! Just consider the gowns, the bonnets, the parasols she might buy herself with half the money, and the good she might do with the other!'

'She might help me a little with my rent and taxes,' said Mrs. Trevornock plaintively, 'though Heaven knows I should never be influenced in such a matter by any consideration of my

own advantage. But I should be so proud, so happy, to see her well placed in life, to see her sitting in her own carriage.'

'And we could go and stay with her at Penruth Place, and wander about the moors. And you would get so strong, mother, in that fine air.'

'Yes, it would be delightful,' said Mrs. Trevornock, who had been pinned to Camberwell for the last seven years.

People who have only just enough for bread-and-cheese cannot afford such indulgences as change of air and scene. The August emigration of the middle classes does not affect them; the long vacation brings them no holiday.

'It would be very nice,' sighed Mrs. Trevornock. 'I have not been to the west since you were born. Your grandmother was kind enough to ask me more than once before she died; but I thought as I had been there with Mr. T. people might make remarks if I went there without him. And after your grandmother's death the old house was let to strangers, and your aunt Sophia bought a place near Exeter.'

'And I have never seen the house where my father was born,' said Flossie. 'That seems hard. Bab was there when she was a little thing in blue shoes. She has a hazy recollection of a garden full of roses, and a land of fatness, where she sat upon people's laps and ate clotted cream and apple-pasty all day long.'

'Yes, it was a dear old house. I doubt if Penruth Place is as pretty.'

Penruth Place was incessantly present to the minds of Mrs. Trevornock and her daughter as the winter wore on. It was what is called an old-fashioned winter--a winter in which grim Death sharpened his sickle and mowed down tender infancy and feeble age; while sturdy youth and middle life slapped its chest and hectorcd about the fine seasonable weather and the glorious frost which--with the small disadvantage of throwing the bulk of the population out of work--made the Serpentine a playground for the idle. Coals went up to starvation price, and the little household in South-lane felt the pinch of poverty more keenly than they had done for the last few years.

Was it that possible six hundred a year, that rejected offer of Vyvyan Penruth's, which made the petty trials and straits of poverty so hard for Mrs. Trevornock this winter? She saw herself with her means lessened to the extent of those stray sovereigns which Flossie had hitherto contrived to extort from her father. He had said he would give them nothing, and he was the kind of man to keep his word. There was a tax-paper on the mantelpiece inviting immediate attention; and Mrs. Trevornock knew not whence the money to meet that demand could come. She had contrived to keep out of debt, but to pay her way from day to day had been her utmost achievement.

The balance between comfort and destitution was so nicely adjusted, that a feather would turn the scale.

Barbara knew this, and there were times when the thought that she might have made the rest of her mother's life serene and free from care shot like an arrow through her heart.

'Darling,' she cried once, throwing her arms round the mother's neck, 'how good you have been to me! how you have worked and striven to make me happy! and when I had it in my power to help you, I refused! It was selfish; it was horrible! I hate myself for my ingratitude; and yet—'

'My dearest, I would never ask you to do anything that was not for your own happiness. And if you felt that you could not be happy with Mr. Penruth, you were quite right in saying so. Can you think I would wish you to sacrifice yourself for my sake? I should like to see you prosperous and well placed in life, and poor Flossie's future more secure; but at my age it can matter very little what may happen to me. I have lived my life. It has not been a fortunate life, but I have been thrice blest in my two dear daughters.'

'No, mother, don't say that. I have not been a good daughter; I am made up of selfishness; I have thought only of myself. But O, if you knew how I loved him!'

Mrs. Trevornock burst into tears.

'My love, I could not have endured your marrying a disgraced man. That would have broken my heart.'

'Don't speak of him, mother; it hurts me too much.'

Very soon after this, the first confidence between Barbara and her mother since Mr. Penruth's offer, Mrs. Trevornock fell ill. She had been slightly out of health all the winter, but had insisted on leading her usual active life, sweeping and dusting and scrubbing in holes and corners, in the unceasing endeavour to maintain that perfection of brightness and cleanliness which distinguished the little house in South-lane from all other houses. But now she broke down altogether, and for the first time within Flossie's memory that expensive luxury, a doctor, appeared at 20 South-lane. He came daily in a smart tilbury with a man in livery, and the two girls felt that the smartness of his equipage would make an appreciable difference in his bill. Hitherto their only medical adviser had been the chemist round the corner by Addington-square; a valuable man, who had a good old-established pharmacopœia at his fingers' ends, and never did any one any harm, even if he sometimes failed in doing good.

The proprietor of the tilbury did not disguise the fact that Mrs. Trevornock was seriously ill. She had neglected herself for a long time; she was weak and low to an alarming degree, and required very careful nursing.

The two girls listened to him with scared faces, hanging upon his words piteously, as if he were the source of good and evil.

'You may be sure we shall be careful, for we love her so dearly,' faltered Barbara. 'Only tell us exactly what to do.'

'There is not much to tell,' said Mr. Asplatt—doctor *par excellence*—'quiet, freedom from worry, and a generous diet. That is all I can suggest at present. A little later, when we have brought our dear mamma round, a change to mild sea-air—Ventnor or Bournemouth, for instance—would be eminently desirable—indeed, I may say absolutely necessary.'

'She must have it,' sighed Barbara, her heart beating tumultuously. 'And about the diet—'

'Must be light and nourishing,' replied the doctor. 'Clear soup, white fish, the breast of a boiled chicken, sweetbread plainly dressed, asparagus, or—if you can't get that—a little sea-kale. The diet should be varied and delicate; and as for wine—'

'Wine!' echoed Flossie hopelessly.

Barbara gripped her sister's hand with fingers cold as death.

'What wine would be best?' she asked the doctor.

'Two or three glasses of old port would not be too much in the course of the day; but mind the wine is thoroughly good and sound—not a heavily-branded port on any account.'

'What is a branded port?' wondered Flossie, stricken with a sense of utter helplessness.

Their adviser encouraged them with a hopeful word or two, and bade them a cheery good-day. He went off so blithely in his tilbury that Flossie hated him as she had rarely hated mortal.

'What are we to do?' she asked her sister, with pitiful appeal.

'We must save our mother. O my dearest, my fondest, I have never loved you half so well as you ought to be loved!' cried Barbara, in a voice half suffocated by sobs.

'She must not see that you have been crying.'

'No, she must not see,' choking down her tears. 'I must go to her at once. She must not know what the doctor says. Worry and care must be kept away from her—somehow.'

'We've had two summonses about that last tax,' said Flossie. 'If it isn't paid within—'

'My father must pay it; he must and shall give us money. I shall write to aunt Sophia this afternoon; she has always been good to us in the hour of need.'

'Yes; she lectures exceedingly, but she does help us. Soup, fish, chicken, asparagus, port, and the tilbury man to be paid afterwards,' said Flossie. 'We shall want a fortune.'

'Will you go to Gray's Inn at once, Flossie, while I nurse mamma and write to aunt Sophia?'

'I would rather walk over burning ploughshares; but I'll go. And if Mr. T. talks about the window, he shall have a bit of my mind. To be married to such a dear woman as my darling mother, and to treat her so! He must have a heart of stone

What are you going to get for ma's dinner? The generous diet ought to begin at once, oughtn't it?'

'Leave that to me, Flossie. You go off to Gray's Inn, and tell your father that his wife will die unless she has comforts which we cannot buy without his help.'

Bab went up to the sick-room, while Flossie ran to prepare herself for a raid on Gray's Inn. The girl sat by her mother's bed, and watched her as she slept the uneasy slumber of sickness. The face—so fresh and bright a few months ago—was pinched and pale. The markings of age showed as they had never done before in a countenance which had kept the bloom of youth long after youth was gone. Yes, it was care which had made those cruel lines; a long struggle with adverse circumstances had hollowed those cheeks. The woman who had carried her troubles so bravely had broken down under the burden at last.

Barbara waited till her mother woke from that brief slumber, and greeted her waking with loving words and caresses.

'Did the doctor say I was very ill?' the invalid asked anxiously.

'No, dearest; but he told us to be careful of you. As if we would not be careful of our treasure! I am going into the Road to get two or three little things. Shall Amelia come and sit with you, mamma dear?'

'No, darling, I shall be quite comfortable alone. But don't be long; I like to know you are near me.'

'I will come back on the wings of love,' answered Bab gaily; and then, full of care, she ran to put on her bonnet and shawl for a momentous expedition in quest of generous diet.

She looked into the well-worn purse which Mrs. Trevornock had surrendered when she grew too ill to conduct the household affairs. It was quite empty. The money had been dribbling away daily and hourly; for illness is a costly calamity. There was no money coming till after Lady-day, when the rent would come in from a small farm, which formed the last remnant of Thomas Trevornock's heritage, and had happily been settled on his wife. And it was now only the middle of February. For the next six weeks Mrs. Trevornock and her daughters would have to exist upon somebody's charity.

'I never felt the sting of beggary before,' thought Barbara, as she shut the empty purse. 'Poor mother used to bear the whole weight of the burden. No wonder it has crushed her. Well, money must be got to-day, somehow; and there is only one way.'

She looked at her solitary treasure—the only ornament she possessed which had any marketable value—the ring George Leland had given her the day after their engagement, a massive band of dull gold with a single diamond in the centre. She had

not even thought of returning this token when their engagement came silently to an end.

'I will keep it so long as I am true to him,' she had said to herself. 'It is not I who break the bond that bound us. Let him claim it from me, if he will. No act of mine shall part us. If he were to come back to me to-morrow repenting his falsehood, I could not refuse to forgive him. I should take him to my heart again.'

But now the time had come when the ring must go out of her possession, for a little while at any rate. She walked hurriedly to the Camberwell-road, where there was a silversmith's shop, before whose glittering window she and Flossie had stood many a time, admiring the Geneva watches, the silver teapots, and debating as to which they would buy if they were suddenly to come into a fortune. The shop stood at a corner, and there was a mysterious door in the side street, a door over which there hung three golden balls.

It was by this dingy doorway that Barbara entered to-day, for the first time in her life. The place within was dark, and smelt of dirt, and she shuddered involuntarily at finding herself elbowed by a fat Irishwoman, who was negotiating a loan upon divers articles of hardware, wrapped in a patchwork counterpane. The shopman turned impatiently from the Irishwoman to ask Barbara what he could do for her. Pretty faces were not rare in that dimly-lighted den, but there was a fresh young beauty in this face which startled the pawnbroker's clerk.

'I want to know if you will lend me some money on a ring,' said Barbara, trying to speak as coolly as if she were an old hand at this kind of business.

'That depends on the value of the ring, and the amount you want upon it, miss,' the man answered glibly. 'I'm sure I'd strain a point to oblige you.'

Bab laid the ring upon the counter with a stifled sigh. The man took it up, and twisted it round between his dingy finger and thumb, and scrutinised the diamond, and breathed upon it, and wetted it with his tongue, and polished it on a coloured handkerchief, and finally appeared to make up his mind that it was genuine.

'Two pun ten,' he said; 'will that do for you?'

'Yes,' answered Barbara, delighted to get so much money.

She held out her hand for the cash; but the youth had to write a ticket, which operation he performed in a leisurely manner, ogling his customer between whiles. Then he brought the money out of a drawer, and dropped a couple of sovereigns into her hand, and then slowly doled out nine shillings and elevenpence-halfpenny.

She was going away without the duplicate; but he called her

back to receive this, and pressed her hand tenderly as he gave it her, and was not crushed by the magnificent frown which darkened her young face as she snatched away the insulted hand, and left a place which seemed to her a den of iniquity. She felt herself contaminated by the whole transaction. Her lover's sacred ring so bartered ; her own self-respect so outraged !

But in the next minute she was thinking of the dear invalid at home, and of the things she had to buy. She bought a plump young fowl ; she bought soup-meat and lemons and grapes ; and finally, with almost as much fear as she had entered the pawnbroker's shop, she crossed the threshold of a respectable wine-merchant's office.

A gentlemanly man of middle age left his desk to attend to her.

'I want a bottle of port, if you please, if you don't mind selling so small a quantity,' she faltered. 'It must be very good, as it is for an invalid. I suppose you have some very good port at about five shillings a bottle?'

'We have port as high as thirty shillings a bottle,' said the wine-merchant, who was a quick observer, and as well able to read the expression of the fair young face as he was to see the heavily-laden basket and the carefully-mended gloves ; 'but I can give you a bottle of good sound wine for five shillings.'

'Thank you. The doctor said it must be old wine. Would it be very much trouble for you to send it?'

'No trouble at all.'

Barbara counted out the five shillings and gave her address, after which the wine-merchant bowed her out as politely as if she had given him a splendid order. But he was assuredly a loser by that five-shilling bottle of port ; unless it were that the consciousness of having done a kindly act was worth the difference between the value of the wine he sent and the price Barbara paid him for it.

Flossie came home from her quest with five-and-twenty shillings, extorted with difficulty, and made bitter by the assurance that they were the last she would get from a righteously-wrathful father.

'Was he not sorry to hear of mamma's illness?' asked Bab indignantly

'He said he was sorry ; but that, whether we were well or ill, he could not coin money. If he were ill himself he would have to go to the workhouse. Nobody would find money for him. He was dreadfully bitter about you.'

'Because I refused to marry Mr. Penruth?'

'Yes.'

'He is very unjust.'

'Mr. Penruth has been in London again,' observed Flossie, rolling up her gloves with elaborate care.

'O !'

'Indeed I believe he is in London now.'

Barbara answered nothing.

The week that followed was full of anxiety. There were no signs of rallying in the invalid, though all that loving care could do to restore health was faithfully done. The money, discreetly administered by Barbara, held out till the end of the week, and then came a welcome five-pound note from aunt Sophia, who had been away from home when Barbara's appeal was sent, and had thus seemed slow to answer.

This remittance Barbara felt marked the limit of her resources. After this there was nothing she could hope for till a week or two after quarter-day. A dreary vista of weeks stretched before her, and depression seized her as she looked forward to them, wondering how the wants of each day were to be supplied. And looking beyond this present necessity, she saw a hopeless future. Her mother's health had so completely broken down within the last few months that it was hardly to be hoped she could ever be again what she had been, ever again be able to take life lightly, and face poverty with a happy temper and an indomitable courage. No ; those days when they had enjoyed themselves on the brink of a precipice, the easy-going hand-to-mouth days, were over and done with. The dread spectre of sickness and death would henceforth be always lurking somewhere near, and happiness would be impossible. For the first time in her life, Barbara realised the helplessness of three women whose means, eked out by casual aids, were hardly enough to suffice for daily necessities, and left no margin for sickness or special needs of any kind. For the first time too she felt what it was to be friendless, or to have only half a dozen friends, all as poor as, or even poorer than, herself. She knew too well that in those families with whom Mrs. Trevornock and her daughters were wont to exchange occasional tea-drinkings, although the outward aspect of things seemed fair and prosperous, there was but a hair's-breadth between that prosperity and destitution. They were genteel families, living in small houses, with one servant, upon incomes which, husbanded and managed ever so skilfully, left hardly the balance of a shilling at the end of the year ; but more often a residuum of debt, to be paid—Heaven knows how!--in a year that would bring no increase of means.

'I never knew that poverty was hard before !' sighed Barbara, looking hopelessly round the pretty little room, with its black-and-white pictures, and gaily-bound books, and stray bits of old china. 'We have contrived to be so happy on so little.'

It was the dreariest of February afternoons ; a drizzling rain had been coming down all day long, with the pertinacity of small things. The sky was dun colour ; the leafless trees, and even the evergreens, looked dismal. All the grace and beauty had gone from South-lane. Barbara stood looking out of the window, sick at heart, yet rooted to the spot somehow, as if there was a fascination in that hopeless prospect.

'It is like my life,' she said to herself—' blank and gray, with not one star shining through it.'

Presently the white gate fell back with scrooping hinges, and a tall figure came stalking up the gravel-path.

How well Barbara knew the tall gaunt form, the rough overcoat, and shabby hat ! No one but a pauper or a millionaire would have dared to wear such a hat or such a coat.

Her first impulse was to run out of the room and tell the servant to say that no one was at home. Then came the thought of the sick mother, sleeping the sleep of weakness up-stairs. He might be useful, perhaps, this rich man. He would send hot-house grapes and fine old wine, very likely, if he knew of Mrs. Trevornock's illness.

'God help me !' thought Bab despairingly. 'Poverty is teaching me to be odiously mean.'

She stayed by the parlour-window, and Amelia ushered in Mr. Penruth, with as much style as can be expected of a maid-of-all-work at nine pounds a year.

'I am sorry to hear of your mother's illness,' he said, as he took Barbara's cold hand in his, looking at her closely, as much as to say, 'I wonder if you have changed your mind since you and I parted.'

'Yes, she is very ill,' sighed Bab. 'My sister and I are full of anxiety.'

She sat down by the dull neglected fire, and waited for her visitor to talk. She had nothing to say to him. There was no subject upon which they could sympathise ; there was no love or liking which they had in common.

'You have good medical advice, I hope ?'

'We have the best doctor in the neighbourhood.'

'And does he consider the case serious ?'

'Very serious,' answered Barbara, trying to keep back her tears.

'Is there anything I can do ?' asked Mr. Penruth. 'I shall esteem it a privilege if I can be of any use.'

'You are very good. No, there is nothing,' began Barbara ; and then, love conquering pride, she faltered, 'Yes, there is one thing. Once, when I was ill, you were kind enough to send me some fruit and flowers. If you would send my mother a few grapes I think she would like them. They are difficult to get here.'

'I will send you some of the best Covent Garden can produce every day. And flowers too; perhaps you would like some flowers for the sick-room?'

'A thousand thanks.'

Then came an awkward silence.

'Have you seen your father lately?' asked Mr. Penruth.

'No; I seldom see him. He does not care about seeing us, and we only go to him when we are obliged.'

'He is a—curious man,' said Mr. Penruth slowly, as if it were gradually dawning upon him that Mr. Trevornock was not perfect in his domestic relations.

'Very curious.'

'I fear you must have had a hard life with such a father.'

'I never felt its hardness till my mother broke down under her burden. She and my sister and I have been very happy together. The sting of poverty never touched us.'

'But now that your mother is ill you begin to find out the hardship of poverty. Why will you not exchange poverty for wealth and comfort? You know that I am prepared to make a settlement that would enable you to provide comfortably for your mother and sister for the rest of their lives.'

Barbara shuddered.

'Yes, you have made a generous offer, and I have refused it. That seems as if I cared very little about my mother and sister, does it not? Yet it is a hard thing for a woman to—No, I should hate myself; life would be a burden to me.'

'Do you mean that you hate me?' asked Vyvyan Penruth, looking at her intently from out of deep-set eyes, shadowed by shaggy brows.

'I do not love you, and I did once love some one else very dearly. If I were to accept your offer it would be for the sake of my mother and sister; it would be for the sake of the settlement. Would that be fair to you? Would you be willing to marry a woman on such terms?'

'I would marry you on any terms. I want you for my wife. I will leave all the rest to Fate.'

'You would marry me knowing that I have given my heart to another man?'

'Yes; provided that all is over and done with between you and that other man. I don't know that I have a jealous nature, but I should not like a man you once loved to cross my path. I should hate him savagely.'

'He is far away, and all is over between us. He gave me up of his own accord. I suppose he met some one he liked better than me.'

'Barbara, will you marry me?' asked Vyvyan Penruth, bending down and taking both her hands in his. 'Let that man

lament his loss far away—in India. Your father told me all about him. Do not waste another thought on him. I shall not. Be my wife. I will trust to time and Fate for the rest.'

'If I were to marry you it would be for my mother's sake,' said Barbara, looking at him earnestly, as if entreating him to decline so bad a bargain.

'I do not care for whose sake it may be, if you will only consent.'

'Remember, I do not even pretend to care for you; I never shall pretend. I will try to do my duty; but it is not in me to do more than that.'

'Duty from you will be a rich reward for my love. You don't know what it is, Barbara, for a man of my age to fall in love. Never since I was five-and-twenty did a woman's face touch my heart, till I saw you. I had my boyish fancy, calf-love—a flame that burnt fiercely for a little while, and then went out for ever. For more than twenty years I lived my jog-trot life, and thought no more of women than if there had been none nearer than the moon. Then I saw you, and my heart woke from its long sleep. I am not a poetical kind of man; I am not clever at finding the proper words to describe my feelings; but I am as true as steel. Be true to me, and I will be faithful and devoted to you. Let the past be dead and buried from this hour. I shall never speak of the man who jilted you. I beg you never to speak of him to me. Is it a bargain, Barbara?'

'Yes,' she sighed; and he raised her hands to his lips and kissed them.

There was a solemnity in the action, as if it were the sealing of a bond.

He saw that she was depressed and anxious, and did not stay much longer.

'I shall stop in town till your mother is well,' he said, as he took leave, 'and then we can fix the day for our wedding.'

'So soon?' she cried. 'O no, no; not this year!'

'Why not? We have nothing to wait for.'

'Yes, we have; we are almost strangers. Let us learn to know each other a little before—'

'I can never know you better or love you better than I do already,' he interrupted passionately. 'Why should we put off our marriage? It is only people who have to study ways and means who need wait. Good-night—God bless you!'

He took her in his arms and kissed her, having the right to do so now, as he thought; and she submitted as helplessly and as hopelessly as she would have done had she fallen into the sea, and felt the arms of some hideous sea-monster winding round her and strangling her.

She went back to the fireside when her visitor was gone

and sat by the dying fire, weeping silently over her own dreary fate.

'I must be a selfish wretch,' she said to herself accusingly; 'for even the thought that it will make my mother's life happy cannot reconcile me to what I have done.'

She had not the courage to go near her mother till late in the evening, but allowed Flossie to perform all her duties in the sick-room. Then at last, when Mrs. Trevornock had asked for her several times, she went quietly in and sat down by the bed, and took the wasted hand in hers silently.

'My darling, what makes you so silent?' asked the invalid anxiously. 'You have not been grieving, I hope? If it be God's will that I am to be taken, surely He will care for you and your sister. You are so friendless that doubtless God will raise up new friends for you. My dearest, I lie here and think of you both till my head swims—'

'Don't think about us any more, mother dear; there is no reason for your anxiety. Only get well—only get strong and well, dear love; that is all I ask of Providence. We are all going to be rich; and—and you shall walk in silk attire, and silver have to spare. I am going to be one of the richest women in Cornwall, mamma. I am going to be Mrs. Penruth.'

'My angel,' exclaimed the mother feebly, but rapturously, 'I always felt that you were born to ride in your carriage. O my love, my darling, you have taken away the fear of death! I shall not leave you behind to face friendlessness and poverty; I can die happy now.'

'No, no, mother, you must not die. It is for your sake—only for your sake!' sobbed Barbara, on her knees by the bedside, her face buried in the coverlet.

CHAPTER XVI.

BURIED LETTERS, BURIED HOPES.

FLOSSIE was elated exceedingly when she was told of her sister's engagement; even the little serving-maid, Amelia, sang louder than ever for joy; the sick mother mended slowly but surely from that hour. Barbara alone was sad. She moved about slowly, as if leaden weights were tied to her feet; her heavy eyes looked straight before her, gazing with infinite horror into a hateful futurity. In her mother's presence she contrived to smile, and even to talk gaily. Love gave her courage, love gave her strength. She was the old happy Barbara in the sick-room. Pride forbade that she should bare her wounds before

the volatile Flossie. To her lover she was uniformly courteous, with a grave politeness which to most men would have been disheartening, but which Vyvyan Penruth accepted placidly, as if he expected nothing more.

There was no need to pay any further visits to the dusky office round the corner by the silversmith's shop. The insolent clerk who had squeezed Barbara's hand saw her no more. Vyvyan gave her a hundred pounds for immediate necessities, and she took the money without compunction. She had sold herself for a price, and she felt no shame in accepting any portion of that price. The shame was in the bargain itself—a deeper shame for her plighted husband than for herself, she thought. One of the first uses she made of Mr. Penruth's money was to send Amelia to redeem her first lover's ring. But the golden circle was never to be worn by her again. The bond of which it was the sign had been doubly broken.

She packed the ring in a little box, and enclosed it with a letter addressed to George Leland's mother, begging her to restore it to her son at a convenient opportunity.

'No doubt you know that Captain Leland cancelled our engagement some months ago,' she wrote. 'Perhaps I ought to have returned the ring then; but I was so foolish as to think that he might change his mind, and that our engagement might some day be renewed, and I could not bear to part with the souvenir of his love. But now I am going to be married I have no right to keep the ring any longer, and I shall esteem it a favour if you will take an early opportunity of sending it to him, with my sincere wishes for his happiness.'

There was no more than this. It was the most commonplace of letters, and seemed heartless in its poverty of phrase. Yet the girl wrote with a breaking heart and eyes drowned in tears.

Hothouse grapes, good old wine, all luxuries that money can buy were delivered in abundance at No. 20 South-lane; but it was not the wine or the invalid turtle, the spring chicken or asparagus, that brought back the colour to Mrs. Trevornock's cheek or the strength to her limbs. It was the knowledge that her children's future was provided for, it was the delightful idea that her favourite daughter was going to be a great lady, that restored her. She had sunk under the weight of petty cares and harassing trivialities, and now the burden was lifted off her shoulders altogether. She had no longer to calculate and provide for the necessities of the morrow. For the first time since her luckless marriage she could fold her hands, and take her rest, and say, with a contented spirit, 'Sufficient for the day is the evil thereof.' She could see no evil in the day or the morrow; she had no misgivings as to her child's happiness. To the matter-of-fact temper of middle age the passions and

sorrows of youth seem of small account. No doubt poor Barbara had been very deeply in love with Captain Leland; but she must have almost forgotten him by this time, and would, as in duty bound, become attached to Mr. Penruth, whose generous devotion was calculated to inspire grateful affection on the part of its object.

'If I had met with such a man in my youth, instead of Mr. T., what a happy woman I should have been!' mused Mrs. Trevornock, forgetting that at nineteen years of age she had not been so well acquainted with the value of worldly wealth as she was now.

A week went by without bringing any response to Barbara's letter, and then came an answer in a strange hand on deeply-bordered mourning-paper:

'Dear Miss Trevornock,—I am sure you will be grieved to hear that my dear mother died last November after a short illness. It has been a terrible blow for us all. I will send the ring to George by the next mail. I am sorry your engagement should have been broken off, but it is perhaps better so for both. My brother has not been fortunate in India, and he is in no position to marry. I think he will be surprised to hear that you are engaged to some one else.—Yours very truly,

'MARIAN LELAND.'

'He has not been fortunate,' sighed Barbara. 'Was it his bad fortune that made him give me up? That can hardly be; for I told him I had no fear of poverty or even of disgrace—that I would be true to him in the darkest days of his life. If he had cared for me he never could have flung me off. Well, it is all over and done with, and it is my duty to forget him.'

She did try honestly to put her lover's image away from her during these early spring days, which seemed to hurry by with inexorable speed, drifting her towards her doom. They were days evermore to be remembered; days now historic. Such great and terrible scenes were being played out yonder in the Crimea, that Barbara's petty griefs should have seemed as nothing to the heroic mind. Yet those small sorrows were large enough to fill her little world. Never had she been so miserable, yet never had the days been so short. She clung to her mother with ever-increasing fondness. The idea of going away to her husband's distant home was intolerable to her.

'How shall I ever bear my life so far away from you?' she said, sitting on a low stool beside her mother's armchair in the sunny southward-fronting window.

South-lane was putting forth buds and blossoms under the April sunlight. The almond-trees were in flower; the lilac-bushes were covered with green buds; the garden was yellow

with daffodils. Mrs. Trevornock was well enough to sit up for an hour or two in her own room, when the day was at its warmest.

'My sweetest, you once thought of putting a much wider distance between us,' she said, smiling down at the sad face nestling against her pillows. 'You did not shrink from the idea of going to India.'

'That was to be three years hence ; and I hardly realised the idea. When the time came it would have been dreadful to go so far away—even with him.'

'Cornwall is really no distance in these railway days. A day's journey at most. And we shall come to stay with you sometimes, I daresay. Mr. Penruth is so kind that I am sure he will wish us to visit you.'

'Of course, of course, mother. My life will be bearable only when you are with me.'

'Barbara, don't talk like that !' cried the mother, looking at her anxiously. 'My love, if you have such a feeling as that—a conviction that you are going to be unhappy in your married life—the marriage must be broken off, late as it is, and though it is such a grand match for you, and has made us all so happy.'

'No, mother, I am not going to break my engagement to Mr. Penruth. One broken engagement in a lifetime is enough, is it not ? But you don't suppose I am desperately in love with him, do you ?'

'No, dear ; but I look forward to your being a good and dutiful wife, and a very happy woman.'

'Yes, mother, I shall be happy ; I am happy, for you are spared to me. O, I am an ungrateful wretch. When you were ill I wearied Heaven with my prayers : and now I am not half grateful enough. I fancy my fate a hard one.'

'My dearest, it is a fate that ninety-nine women out of a hundred would envy,' interrupted Mrs. Trevornock.

'Do you mean that ninety-nine out of a hundred would marry for money ?'

'Yes, dear, if they had learned the value of money, as we have, by bitter experience.'

'Bitter experience !' echoed Bab. 'Whatever my future may be, I shall look back at my days in South-lane as the happiest part of my life.'

Everything was settled. The wedding-day was fixed for the 20th of May. Mr. Penruth was unaffected by Flossie's protest against a wedding in May as proverbially unlucky. He was not given to such small superstitions, though not entirely free from that leaven of belief in the uncanny which lies deep in the Cornish nature, not to be eradicated by time or civilisation. There was every reason to suppose that by the 20th of May Mrs. Trevornock would be well enough to assist at her daughter's marriage

and, except her illness, there was no reason for delay. It was all decided with very slight reference to Barbara. She gave her consent to the arrangements with a meekness which was rather submission than content. The when and the how mattered little to her, since this thing was to be.

Aunt Sophia wrote warmly in approval of the new engagement, and sent her niece fifty pounds to buy wedding-gowns. She had considered Barbara's previous engagement the height of imprudence. She had disapproved of Captain Leland as a partial boarder, she had disapproved of him as a lover. The whole business had, in her estimation, been one of poor Flora's mistakes. But now she was enthusiastic in her congratulations.

'I know all about Mr. Penruth, but by repute only,' she wrote to her sister-in-law; 'for his estate is so very far west, and the Penruths have been always rather an eccentric family, living very much by themselves. They are among the best people in Cornwall, as no doubt you know. One of the Penruths married a Miss Mohun, an heiress. They have intermarried with the Carcws. Barbara ought to feel vastly proud of making such a marriage. Mr. Penruth's age may perhaps appear a drawback in her mind; but as he has never been married before, and is so devoted in his attachment to her, that should make very little difference. I consider her a most fortunate girl; and I think that even you, Flora, will allow that in this instance my brother Thomas has done very well for one of his daughters, and has some claim to your gratitude.'

Slowly and reluctantly Barbara set about the purchase of her wedding-clothes. She shrank with secret horror from any act or part in the preparations for her marriage. Yet she tried heroically to hide her misery, lest her mother's love should prevent the sacrifice.

'What a strange girl you are!' exclaimed Flossie. 'I'm sure if I had my purse stuffed full of bank-notes I should be rushing off to the Road to spend them.'

The Road—otherwise the Walworth-road, or at furthest Newington-causeway—bounded Flossie's horizon in the way of shops. But here Mrs. Trevornock, with her experience of a previous existence in more fashionable localities, suggested a cab and a pilgrimage to Regent-street and Oxford-street.

'That will be delightful!' cried Flossie. 'A cab! To think that we can afford to hire a cab whenever we want one! It is like entering upon a new stage of existence.'

'You really had better make your purchases this afternoon, Bab,' urged Mrs. Trevornock, who had now descended to the parlour. 'We are halfway through April already, and dress-makers are so slow.'

Barbara had no objection to offer; so she and Flossie went

to Oxford-street, and selected such raiment as might be suitable to a Cornish gentleman's wife living in a lonely old house far off the beaten tracks. Mr. Penruth had counselled her to buy no finery. He kept no company at Penruth Place. His nearest neighbour lived seven miles off. This might have seemed a dreary look-out, even for a woman who married for love. But it made no difference to Barbara.

'You will let my mother and sister come and see me sometimes, won't you?' she asked one day.

'Yes, of course. They can come when they like, but I'm afraid they'll find it dull. Your sister won't like Cornwall. She's fond of gaiety, theatres, concerts, and so on.'

'Yes, but she is fond of the country too,' urged Barbara. 'I hope you will let me have my mother and Flossie to stay with me—often.'

She would have liked to have said 'always,' for she felt that only under such conditions could her Cornish life be tolerable.

'O, yes, they can come,' responded Penruth, not too graciously, 'provided they and my sister can hit it pretty well together.'

Barbara shivered. That sister, of whom she had heard so little, but who was always spoken of as a fixture at Penruth Place, a feminine edition of Mr. Penruth, was a person to be thought of with some apprehension.

'Does your brother live with you?' she asked once, wondering whether she was to support existence with three of the Penruth race.

'Yes; Mark has free quarters at Place. He is fond of horses and dogs, and makes better use of my stables than I do. But he is not always with us. He has a couple of rooms at the Quarries, and we sometimes see nothing of him for a week on end.'

'Is he like you?'

'No,' answered Vyvyan, with a grim smile. 'He is the buck of the family. He favours his mother, who was a Carew. He was a handsome fellow once, but he has contrived to get rid of his good looks somehow, though he is my junior by eleven years.'

Flossie enjoyed herself vastly that April afternoon at the West-end drapers'. It was she who chose everything, she who decided what the future Mrs. Penruth ought or ought not to have. Barbara sat by and looked on, the picture of indifference. Flossie thought this arose from an innate want of taste in her elder sister.

'Some people have no taste in dress, no ideas,' she said to herself; 'that kind of thing is born with one.'

She rattled away mercilessly to Barbara in those blank intervals when the shopman had gone to fetch fresh goods.

'You must have one or two dinner-dresses,' she said; 'however far off your neighbours may live, they must give dinner-parties, and with plenty of horses in your stables you won't consider distance. You ought to have a velvet gown. Shall it be ruby or black?'

'By all means black.'

'But you have chosen two black gowns already; surely you are not going to wear perpetual mourning.'

'I like black.'

'Well, if your dinner-parties are to be few and far between, perhaps black velvet would be best. It would take you ages to wear out a ruby velvet, but you can wear out black velvet by your own fireside.'

'How far-seeing you are, Flossie!'

'In choosing a trousseau one has to study contingencies,' answered Flossie sagely.

It was Mr. Penruth's particular desire there should be no fuss about the wedding.

'We can't be married too quietly,' he said; 'I know nobody in London, and I—I suppose you haven't many friends in the neighbourhood.'

'Very few,' answered Mrs. Trevornock.

And then she ran over the names of about ten people, the people with whom she had been wont to exchange small hospitalities in the way of tea and muffins, whom she would like to invite to the breakfast.

'Oblige me by not inviting any of them,' said Mr. Penruth; 'when a man of my age marries a pretty girl he does not care to make a spectacle of himself. Let us be married as quietly as possible. I suppose Mr. Trevornock will give away his daughter.'

'I suppose so,' faltered Mrs. Trevornock, thinking that there might be some awkwardness in the sudden appearance of her husband in a neighbourhood where she was popularly supposed to be a widow; not that she had ever so declared herself. She had only been silent as to the existence of Mr. T., save to those more intimate friends who knew the troublous history of her married life.

If the wedding were strictly private no one need know of Mr. Trevornock's brief appearance on the domestic stage. So the good lady renounced the pleasing idea of a procession of carriages drawn by snow-white horses, artfully touched up with whiting for the occasion, and that elegant confectioner's breakfast which she had planned in honour of her daughter.

There was to be no breakfast at all, in the festive sense of

the word. Barbara was to be married in her travelling-dress of dark silk, and she and her husband were to drive from the church to the railway station, on their way to Paris, where they were to spend their honeymoon. Mr. Trevornock had informed Flossie of his intention of not setting his foot inside No. 20 South-lane. He had no objection to perform a father's part in giving Barbara away, as she was making a marriage he highly approved. But beyond that he would not go. He had not forgotten how badly he had been treated; the bad treatment consisting of his having been relieved of the burden of a wife and daughters whom he had never been able or willing to support.

'It isn't a very lively notion of a wedding,' said Flossie to the bride elect, 'but as you are going to be enormously rich it doesn't much matter. When I marry I shall insist upon making a feature of my wedding-day; but I daresay I shall espouse some wretched pauper, and that we shall have to pinch afterwards.'

The 20th of May arrived, so soon, so terribly soon. Barbara had watched the swift days hurry by with a dim idea that something would happen, something wild and strange, to prevent that hateful marriage. She had steeled herself to the issue. She was resolutely bent upon the sacrifice which was to make her mother's life secure from adversity. Yet she had a vague fancy that the sacrifice would be prevented somehow. The stroke of doom would not descend. She remembered the story of Iphigenia, and how the offended goddess relented and provided a stag for the altar, while the gentle victim was carried off in a cloud, to regions of everlasting bliss. George Leland would come back from India, faithful and fond as in the first days of their love, powerful to save her. Wealth would drop down from the skies. Some relative or friend unknown would leave her mother a fortune.

She dreamt nightly of some strange and sudden release. She felt the delicious sense of recovered freedom, and awoke to the grim reality. The days were slipping by, the days had gone; this pale-gray dawn, flushed with rose on its eastward edge, was her wedding-day. She awoke as early as she had done on that other fatal morning, when George Leland was to sail from Southampton. Sleep was impossible. There are doomed wretches who can slumber on the eve of their execution, can lie down and take their rest with that hideous end staring them in the face. Barbara was not made of such stern stuff. She started from her pillow at the first glimmer of dawn, got up, and put on her dressing gown, and went over to her little table by the window, to make an end of her past.

Her desk, a roomy old mahogany desk, was filled with George Leland's letters. She had kept them till this final day. Something might happen. So long as that hope remained, were it

ever so faint, she had kept those dear evidences of a dead and gone love. To destroy them even now seemed a kind of sacrilege, almost a murder. She handled the letters gently, as if they had been living creatures. She sat waiting for clearer light, that she might read some of them for the last time. Dear letters, full of tenderness. Light-hearted happy letters, breathing hope.

'O my love, my love, why did you grow weary of me?' she cried, in her despair; 'I know you loved me once.'

The sun was high before she had read the last of those fond protestations, which the writer's after-conduct had so strangely belied. But at last there was no excuse for lingering over those lines any longer. She lit her taper, and held one of those doomed letters over the flame. Only for a moment. A curious fancy came into her head. She smiled at her own foolishness. The church-clock chimed the half hour after six.

'There will be time for me to do it,' she said to herself. 'No one will be getting up till after seven. I won't burn his letters. I'll bury them.'

She wrapped the packet of flimsy letters in a sheet of foolscap, sealed it in three or four places, and wrote upon it, 'G. L.'s letters. May 20th, 1855;' then she put the sealed packet into a small tin box, and with this box in her hand she ran down to the garden, bare-headed, in her dressing-gown and slippers.

She went to the end of the garden, to a spot where lilies of the valley grew abundantly in the angle of the crumbling old wall, under the shadow of a barren fig-tree. Here seven years ago she had dug a grave for a beloved canary that had perished untimely, a victim to the treachery of a favourite cat. She remembered the childish tears which had rained upon that innocent grave. And now in the pride of her womanhood she came to the same spot to bury the memorials of a disappointed love.

She fetched a spade from the little summer-house where the garden-tools were stored in a dark corner, and dug a deep hole between the lilies and the rugged old roots of the fig-tree. It was as much as she could do to find space enough for the grave of her hopes amidst the bulbs that had spread and multiplied all over the ground. When she had dug deep enough to please her fancy, she knelt down and dropped the little tin box into its grave, and then filled in the earth again, and trod it down with her feet.

'The lilies will be all growing over the place next year,' she said to herself; 'but I shall never forget the spot; and perhaps some day when I am an old woman I shall come here and dig up those dear letters and read them again, wondering at their foolishness. For it seems to me that elderly people have a curious knack of forgetting their youth.'

It was a breezy morning, one of those days of delusive sun-

shine and east wind common to the treacherous month of May. Barbara was chilled to the bone by the time her task was finished. She hurried back to the house, shivering violently, as the clocks were striking seven.

'I am glad I did not burn them,' she said to herself. 'It would have been as bad as cutting off one of my own limbs.'

'For goodness gracious' sake where have you been?' cried Flossie, sitting up in bed, her twisted locks bristling with hair-pins, like a new Medusa.

'I have been gathering the first lilies of the valley for my wedding-bouquet,' answered Barbara, with a hysterical laugh. 'I shall always remember those lilies on the anniversaries of this day.'

She dressed herself as quietly as if being married were the commonest event in life, while Flossie fussed and bustled and protested tearfully that her hair never had been so difficult to do since she was born.

'It serves me right for putting it in hair-pins, when it has a natural ripple,' she said. 'It was all that stupid Amelia's advice. "Twist it in and out of an 'air-pin, miss," she said, "like I do." As if she were a model.'

There was a hurried agitated breakfast in the garden-parlour—scene of all those cosy tea-drinkings of days gone by, which never, never, never could be again. No one ate anything, but cups of tea were drunk feverishly. Mrs. Trevornock was painfully agitated, and looked pale and wan in her new gray-silk gown. She wondered how Mr. T. would behave to her. It was twelve years since she had seen him.

'We have always written to each other in a friendly tone,' she said; 'but it will be awkward meeting him.'

Barbara was the quietest of the three. Her cheeks were faintly flushed, her eyes were brighter than they had been for some time.

'You never looked lovelier, darling,' said her mother fondly. 'That dark purple suits your complexion admirably.'

The wedding-gown was as sombre of hue as it could be without being black. The wedding-bonnet was in no way distinguished from the bonnets of every-day life.

'Not a scrap of orange-blossom!' protested Flossie. 'It looks unlucky.'

Pinned against the bosom of the bride's dress there was a single lily of the valley. Her own tremulous hands had fastened it there, a token of the spot beneath which her lover's letters lay buried.

The sunny morning had clouded over a little as they drove in a hired carriage to the church by the canal. It was as if May had retrograded to March.

Mr. Penruth was waiting for them at the door of the church, in company with Mr. Trevornock and Mr. Maulford, at sight of whom Barbara drew back with a shudder of absolute antipathy.

'What business has he here?' she thought. 'Has he come on purpose to remind me of that day at Southampton?'

She had an unreasonable dislike to her father's articulated clerk, an unreasonable idea that he was her enemy.

Flossie turned up her pert little nose at sight of the intrusive Maulford, but was rather glad there was an extra man to admire the waviness of her hair and the perfect fit of her new gown, to say nothing of her bonnet, which had been the study of the last ten days.

Mr. T. greeted his wife with a careless 'How d'ye do, Flora?' and gave her the tips of his fingers to shake. The settlement had been duly executed. He felt himself a pattern father. What more could the most careful parent do for his child than to get her such a husband as Vyvyan Penruth, or rather such a settlement as Vyvyan Penruth had made? The man himself was a secondary consideration.

It was a humdrum wedding. The service was hurried over by a gray-haired curate, who had grown elderly while he waited for a living that had been promised him when he was a lad at school. He had no idea that he was marrying 'this woman' to so much money in the person of 'this man.' The bond was sealed in the shortest possible time, and Barbara was Mrs. Penruth.

'If George Leland were to rush into the church this instant, rich, triumphant, eager to marry me, it would be no use,' she thought, remembering her wild dreams last night. 'All is over.'

CHAPTER XVII.

PLACE.

A LONELY land, a heathery plateau among the hill-tops, swept by the winds that blow over the Atlantic; steeped in salt spray, and made barren by the bitter breath of the sea; yet not all barren, for the short grass is soft and sweet, fairy-like ferns grow in every crevice of the stony banks, and the warm purple of blossoming heath relieves the cold gray of the granite, which breaks through the soil like a flower. These are the great Gorse Moors which stretch wide across the land down to Lanivet, near Bôdnin. Far off, like couchant lions, appear the dark forms of the two Cornish hills, Rough Tor and Brown Willy. One sees them from every side, at every turn, as one faces westward. Looking back to the east, and to civilisation, the white walls of

Dartmoor prison glimmer faintly in the far distance, on a moorland waste that looks like a valley when surveyed from this mightier land.

It seems like a bit of some grand old world where giants may have lived and flourished. There is a spaciousness, an airiness, unknown in a pastoral country hemmed in by hedges-rows and dotted with the dwellings of humanity. Here you may drive for miles without passing a human habitation. Even those open stretches of land redeemed from barrenness to the uses of agriculture have a wild untenanted look. One sees no labourer at work. All is silence and loneliness. No voice save the everlasting voices of Nature : the hum of the bee among the heather ; ocean's mighty diapason dwindling to a murmur in the sunny distance ; the cry of the sea-gull ; the melodious rapture of the lark.

Upon this Cornish moorland, within a day's walk of the great brown tors, stood the dwelling-place of the Penruths, the house in which Penruths had been born into this world, and lived and died, for the last two hundred and fifteen years. Penruths had owned the land ever since the days of King Stephen, and had worn out more than one substantial mansion in the course of their holding. The present house had been built in 1650 ; but had all the characteristics of an older date, for architectural innovations were slow to travel so far west. The mansion had been known as New Place for a hundred years or so, which name had gradually lapsed into Place, by which brief appellation Mr. Penruth's house was now called, from Launceston to St. Columb, or wherever the name of Penruth was known.

The house looked as old as the Tudors. Its original splendour, which consisted in a stony solidity and grandeur of size and outline, had not been enhanced by modern improvement. The Penruths had altered nothing ; for alterations are costly, and a turn for hoarding had been hereditary in that ancient and respectable race. The furniture was as old as the Stuarts, save for some handsome additions of carved black wood, and a brace of Japanese cabinets, which an adventurous Penruth had brought home from India. The state-rooms were dark and gloomy, spacious, but not lofty. The homelier living-rooms were small and stuffy. A good many of the windows were made not to open at all, and in those which were intended to admit air a single lattice was the only opening. But to counter-balance such small objections as closeness and gloom there were richly moulded ceilings, embossed with the Penruth arms ; a noble old staircase ; a long narrow ballroom in the roof, wherein nobody had ever danced within the memory of man ; and a picture-gallery, where two lines of portraits, staring at each

other with a perpetual stony stare, told how grim a race the Penruths had been from a period coeval with the invention of oil-painting.

The house lay far off the narrow coach-road, which went undulating across the hills to St. Colomb. There was a lodge by the roadside, which served as a habitation for Mr. Penruth's solitary gardener; then came a plantation of oak and Scotch fir; then a stretch of pasture, with a carriage-road across it—pasture which might, if one were ambitiously minded, be called a park; and then, separated from this grazing-land by a sunk fence, came the gardens and shrubberies, which were beautiful exceedingly; for here, screened by a belt of fir and tamarisk from the pitiless salt-sea winds, there bloomed such flowers as thrive abundantly in this western world—rose and myrtle, jasmine and magnolia, woodbine and clematis, fuchsia and hydrangea.

Miss Penruth had a taste for horticulture, and prided herself in a collection of irreproachable dahlias; but, even in this feminine hobby, she was no enthusiast. She was severely matter-of-fact in her views of this lower world, but had large ideas as to the world above, where she believed that all things denied her on earth were to be awarded to her in liberal measure as the just recompense of her virtues here below. She looked at life from a spiritual standpoint, talked of herself and of her fellow-creatures as 'worms,' and referred continually to the hereafter where she and the chosen few who took her for their model were to have everything their own way. Yet she was not without distinctly human weaknesses. She had begun life as a beauty, in the estimation of those few families scattered wide apart within a radius of twenty miles of wild open country, who constituted her own particular world. She had been several times on the brink, or had fancied herself on the brink, of matrimony; but her ventures in this line had not been fortunate. She had affected long engagements, and on more than one occasion had exhausted in small attentions and the monotonous meandering of a rural courtship that stock of affection which should have sufficed for married life. One lover had grown tired of his bonds, and had jilted Miss Penruth of Place to marry a chubby-cheeked lassie from Camelot, whose father was parish doctor. Another had taken to strong drinks, from very weariness of soul, and had gone altogether to the bad after Miss Penruth's wedding-clothes had been bought. The wedding-clothes were folded and put away in huge camphor chests and lavender-scented drawers, where Miss Penruth sometimes gratified herself by a leisurely survey of those garments, shaking out the silken skirts, refolding the delicate muslins, sighing over them gently as she put them away.

'Ah, I shall wear *my* wedding-gown by and by,' she told herself.

These tender disappointments, though all to be largely compensated in a better world, had not been without their effect upon Priscilla Penruth's temper. She took an equally sour view of life in general, despised the frivolity of her sex, and had strong opinions as to the ultimate destiny of every one—especially every woman—who was not so pious as herself.

Miss Penruth was now nine-and-thirty years of age. She had dismissed the last of her lovers with a fretful sense of disappointment, but with no real grief; and she had made up her mind to die unmated. She had essayed various specimens of humanity, and had found them all wanting. She had tried the gold, the silver, and the leaden casket, and had discovered emptiness in all. Her lover of good old family and independent means, her rising young doctor, her penniless curate, had all been failures. Her pharisaical piety and over-weening self-esteem had worn them out one by one; but she saw in their defection only the evidence of their own unworthiness.

She had never been really desirous of changing her condition. As Miss Penruth of Place she possessed all she cared for. She had inherited a fortune from her mother, and had grown to womanhood with a very definite idea of her own importance. She was fond of money, and, though she did not dislike spending it upon herself, would have objected to see it squandered by a husband or frittered away upon children. In her brother's house she spent hardly anything, save on dress and on certain small charities—beneficences which maintained her dignity as a Lady Bountiful at a very moderate cost. She had the satisfaction of seeing her funded capital increase year by year. On the whole she was not sorry to have escaped the rocks and quicksands of matrimony; but the emotions and agitations of so many courtships, all ending dolorously, had left an abiding sourness in her temper and disposition, together with a languorous manner, as of one who considered life hardly worth living.

Miss Penruth received the news of her brother's marriage with deepest indignation. That Vyvyan should marry a girl of twenty, whom he had known only for a few months, and of whose family and surroundings he gave the very briefest account, and that he should do this thing without asking her advice about it, was an unpardonable offence. She and everybody else who knew him had decided that he was to end his days as a bachelor. His younger brother, Mark, would doubtless do the same, since he had passed his thirty-sixth birthday without a thought of matrimony. The estate would go to a distant cousin on the other side of the county, a man of inferior status, but whose religious opinions Miss Penruth knew to be of the exact shade of

her own. She had sounded him some years before upon the subject of the Gorham controversy, and had found him orthodox to the core. And in the mean time Priscilla would hold undisturbed sway at Place, and everything would go on as it had gone on since her mother's death, just eighteen years ago.

Thus it was that Miss Penruth's feelings, as she paced the broad gravel-walk in front of the house on a sunny July evening, waiting for the coming of bride and bridegroom, were by no means of an enviable character.

They were coming in a post-chaise from Launceston, where the North Cornwall coach was to deposit them, and they were expected between eight and nine o'clock. The evening was lovely, and floating over hill and heather in the soft clear air Miss Penruth heard the faint sound of distant joy-hells. They were ringing a merry peal in the old tower of Treglith Church, far away across the common.

'That must be Mark's officiousness,' thought Priscilla. 'Why joy-hells? My brother has married a nobody, and the less fuss there is about his marriage the better for all of us. There will be talk enough in the county.'

She walked slowly up and down, pausing every now and then to look across the wide stretch of pasture to the furthest curve of the white carriage-road, round which the post-chaise must appear presently. She had dressed herself in her handsomest silk gown, and had decorated herself with jewelry of a substantial rather than an elegant order—a massive gold chain, cameo earrings, brooch, and bracelet. She had none of her brother's carelessness about costume, and thought it her duty to adorn her handsome person lest the young wife should crow over her middle-aged sister-in-law.

'I am not going to be trampled upon,' Miss Penruth said to herself.

Undoubtedly she had been handsome, and was handsome still, but her beauty was not of a melting or even a pleasing kind. Her forehead was high and narrow, her nose aquiline, her eyes large and cold and gray, eyes that seemed made to scan the faults and shortcomings of humanity with a clear cruel stare. Miss Penruth's mouth was her worst feature. Cruelty was written on the thin lips, stretching wide over teeth which were happily white and regular. Given a savage set of teeth, and this one feature would have made the lady a Gorgon. Tall and erect in figure, dignified in her walk, Miss Penruth was a person to be respected even by those who least admired her.

The honeymoon had been prolonged far beyond Mr. Penruth's original intention, for in Paris the bride had fallen desperately ill of a fever—so ill that first her life and afterwards her reason had been in danger; and when she was well enough to be

moved her husband had taken her on to Switzerland, in the hope that mountain air would bring back youth and freshness to the faded face, and strength to the feeble limbs. He had made light of his wife's illness in his letters home, and had written with all the cheerfulness which a bridegroom is expected to exhibit. If he knew already that his marriage was a mistake, he had taken care to keep that knowledge to himself.

Miss Penruth was beginning to tire of Nature and solitude when a door in the ivy-covered wall at the end of the gravel-walk opened, and a man came out of the stable-yard and strolled slowly towards her. This was Mark, the manager at the slate-quarries, the youngest of the Penruth family, a gentleman who took life easily, as it was thought, being entirely dependent on his brother both for the present and the future. To him Vyvyan's marriage must needs be a death-blow, as it reduced his chance of inheriting the Penruth estate to zero. The estate was untenanted, and entirely at his brother's disposal. Even if there were no issue to the marriage, who could doubt that the fair young wife would be preferred to the brother?

'A brother counts for nothing,' said Mark, snapping his fingers contemptuously, as he played with his dogs in the big stable-yard.

Mark was a passionate lover of horses and dogs, nay, of animals of all kinds. His love of sport often got the better of his affection for the brute creation; but he loved even the beasts he hunted, and he always felt a thrill of pain when he saw the hare winding feebly in her last giddy circle as the yelping hounds closed round her, or the lame stag making his last wild rush for the blessed refuge of streamlet or lake.

He was fond of ferrets and ratting terriers, but he always felt sorry for the rats. He had once kept a cub-fox in his bedroom at Place, and had a small menagerie there now in his rooms among the gables, much to the disgust of his sister, who asserted her liking for animals 'in their proper place.'

'Yes, Pris; but your idea of their proper place is at the bottom of a pond, or nailed flat against the stable-wall, isn't it, now?' said Mark.

'I hope I am not a cruel person,' replied Miss Penruth, with her stately air, 'but I cannot imagine myself making a friend of a weasel.'

'Ah,' retorted Mark, 'that's because you don't know what good company a weasel can be.'

Mark came sauntering along the gravel-walk, with his face to the rosy western sunlight. He had a lazy gait and a lazy manner, though he was said to be a first-rate man of business, and as sharp as a needle in all commercial transactions. He was better-looking than his elder brother, to whom he bore no

resemblance. Mark favoured the Carews, his mother's family. He had blue eyes, dark hair, and regular features; but the sloping chin with a dimple in the middle of it indicated weakness of character, and the blue eyes had a shifty irresolute look, and were not inclined to meet the direct gaze of other people.

It was said that Mark Penruth might have married well within the last ten years, if it had not been for a certain entanglement into which he had slipped unawares early in life, the history whereof was known to almost everybody in the neighbourhood better than to his brother and sister.

He had a good salary for his services at the quarries, and he had what Vyvyan called the run of his teeth at Place. He had also the run of three or four horses' teeth, and as many dogs as he liked to keep in the roomy old stable-yard. He hunted regularly as long as there was any hunting to be had, but not to the neglect of the business at the quarries, or so he assured his brother. Altogether his life ought to have been eminently agreeable, and yet he did not look like a man whose mind is at ease.

'What a worried dissatisfied look you have, Mark!' his sister said to him on this very evening, as they walked up and down, waiting for the post-chaise.

'Have I? Well, that's likely enough. I've been a good deal worried lately.'

'What can you have to be anxious about?'

'Plenty of things. Life is made up of worries. There's that bay mare I bought last Christmas getting groggy in front. I'm afraid it's navicular. I gave ninety pounds for her, and she's hardly worth ninety pence.'

'You shouldn't buy so many horses.'

'How should I live in this gloomy hole without horses and dogs? I'm not like Vyvyan; I've no money-bags to gloat over. And you see, with all his pretence of wisdom, he turns out to be a bigger fool than I am, and goes and marries a girl of twenty.'

Miss Penruth expressed no opinion. She had a calm contempt for Mark, which prevented her opening her mind to him on any subject that she felt deeply. And this marriage of her brother's was a theme which she could hardly have trusted herself to discuss with any one yet awhile. She might be betrayed into language unworthy of a Christian. If she had spoken at all, she must have spoken strongly.

The carriage came round a curve in the drive, a pair of white horses, a blue-jacketed postillion flogging them along with a show of swiftness. Mark and Priscilla stood side by side in front of the wide doorway, waiting the coming of the bride. Vyvyan's head was thrust out of the window as the carriage approached. He was looking older and grayer than when he left Cornwall,

Priscilla thought. He opened the door and jumped out almost as the carriage drew up.

'How do, Pris? how do, Mark?' he muttered, with briefest greeting, turning to help his wife to alight.

Priscilla stood like a statue, her face a blank. Curiosity, interest, kindly feeling, there was none in that stony countenance. Mark looked curious and eager. He expected a blaze of beauty.

The young wife descended from the carriage with hesitating steps, leaning on her husband's shoulder. Mark recoiled in amazement at sight of a pale face in which there was little beauty save the glory of large gray eyes shadowed by long dark lashes, and the exquisite delicacy of the white-rose complexion.

Barbara gave her hand to Miss Penruth, who took it with as much coolness as was compatible with taking it at all. Mark grasped the thin little hand heartily.

'Welcome to Penruth Place,' he said, as he offered the bride his arm. 'Shall I take you indoors while Vyvyan sees to the luggage? You are looking very tired.'

'She has been ill,' said Vyvyan. 'Paris didn't agree with her and Switzerland didn't agree with her. The first place was too noisy, the second too quiet. I hope Cornwall will suit her better.'

'It is very grand,' said Barbara, looking far away towards the big brown tors, and shivering a little after her drive through the keen moorland air, 'and very beautiful; but O, how lonely!'

'You didn't expect to find it like the Camberwell-road, I hope,' said her husband.

'No,' she said, sudden tears welling up in her eyes. 'I'm afraid I shall never like any place as well as I liked the Camberwell-road.'

'That's a queer idea of rustic beauty or town splendour,' grumbled Vyvyan. 'Take her indoors, Mark. She's tired after her journey. And you can show her our rooms, Priscilla, I hope you've smartened them up a bit.'

'You sent me no instructions.'

'I didn't think it necessary. Your own instinct ought to have been enough.'

'I could not presume to anticipate Mrs. Penruth's taste,' answered Priscilla stiffly.

Barbara looked at her hopelessly, seeing that here was an enemy where she might have expected a friend. Well, it would make little difference. In a fate so joyless one bitter drop could hardly count.

'I thought you'd have made a few improvements,' said Vyvyan. 'However, perhaps it's better you let 'em alone. Barbara can please herself.'

'You are very kind,' answered his wife. 'I am sure I shall not want to alter anything.'

'Don't be too sure of that. You've no idea how old-fashioned we are,' said Mark. 'There's hardly been a stick altered since the Commonwealth.'

They were in the hall by this time—the large dusky old hall, with its trophies of war and chase, its dark oak walls and lofty chimney-piece. To Barbara the house looked gloomily splendid. It had a historical air that thrilled her. She looked round her with almost as deep an awe as she had felt when Captain Leland took her to the Tower of London, and she had stood among the shadows that had darkened so many doomed lives in the days of old.

The evening dusk made the abiding gloom of the staircase and corridor a little gloomier than usual, as Barbara followed Miss Penruth up the shallow beeswaxed steps to the picture-gallery, out of which the numerous bedchambers opened. The room into which the young wife was ushered was long and low, a room with two broad windows, deeply recessed and heavily mullioned—delicious old windows, round whose stonework wreathed myrtle and roses, and on whose cushioned seats it would be delightful to lie and doze away life on a drowsy summer afternoon. Without, the lovely evening sky was fading from rose to gray. Within, all was gloom: a low ceiling supported by massive beams, ponderous oak furniture made to last for centuries, a carpet and curtains of the same faded neutral tint; a tapestried wall, whereon some forest scene was depicted in sombre greens and melancholy grays, the figures of huntsmen and hounds dimly visible against a leafy background; and an antique four-post bedstead with tall twisted columns and a richly-carved cornice—all things which had been splendid and costly in their day, but which time had faded to grayness and gloom.

Priscilla stalked before her sister-in-law, with the air of a jailer conducting his prisoner to the condemned cell. She had not even tried to smile. She looked at Barbara with a gaze that did not even affect kindness.

'Thank God, I am no hypocrite!' she said to herself, rejoicing like the Pharisee of old in her own virtues.

'This has always been Vyvyan's room,' she said, standing stiff and straight beside the door. 'But of course you can make any changes you like. If you prefer my room, at the south end of the house, it is quite at your disposal.'

'On no account. Could you suppose I should wish to inconvenience you?' protested Barbara. 'I hope we are going to be good friends, Miss Penruth.'

'That will depend upon you,' answered Priscilla. 'I am not hasty in my friendships. I have lived very much alone, and I have built high.'

Barbara stared at her in blank wonder, not in the least understanding the drift of this last observation.

"He builds too low who builds below the stars," quoted Miss Penruth solemnly, from one of the few poets whom she considered worthy a Christian gentlewoman's notice. 'I have built the habitation of my hopes above this sordid sinful world, and worldly friendships can have but a weak hold upon me.'

'O,' faltered Barbara, feeling that this was something worse than she had anticipated; and then Miss Penruth walked out of the room, and shut the door behind her.

Barbara tottered feebly to the broad window-seat, and flung herself down by the open lattice, through which the cool evening air came laden with the breath of innumerable roses. She had been very ill—dangerously ill; for many days and nights an inhabitant of that dim borderland between life and death, from which the struggling soul comes back with weary flight to find the common round of daily life passing cold and strange—a soul new-born, as it were, into a new world. After her wedding-day, when all was over, the knot tied, the vow vowed, the life-long sacrifice consummated, her fortitude had suddenly given way, the cord so long stretched to its utmost tension snapped in a moment, and before the first ten days of her honeymoon were over she was lying in the strange room at Maurice's hotel in a high fever, her body prostrate in that unfamiliar place, her mind back in the Camberwell garden in the days of her girlhood.

In those long nights of delirium every secret of that broken heart was revealed to the husband, who sat by his wife's pillow, watching and listening, half in sorrow, half in anger. He heard her tender talk of her first lover—heard her live over again those halcyon days of perfect love and perfect faith—heard her cry of despair as those wild eyes, staring at the dull blankness of the papered wall, saw the Hesper glide out of harbour over a summer sea.

'O cruel sea, to take him from me!' she cried. 'George, my love, my dearest, how shall I bear my life till you come back?'

Yes, in those wild ravings of a distracted brain the husband heard how his rival had been loved—how deeply, how innocently—with what treasures of young hope and affection. He listened, and his soul was wrung with jealousy: yet he knew that he had hardly the right to be angry. Had she not told him honestly of that first love? and he had professed himself content to take her, knowing that she had loved another, knowing that she did not love him.

Nothing could surpass the devotion of the grim-looking English bridegroom, with his gray clothes and iron-gray hair. He was the admiration of the hotel-people—proprietor, waiters, and chambermaids, doctors and sick-nurse. He flung about his

money as if it were water. He was the ideal *milord Anglais*, gaunt and ungainly, rich and lavish. His Cornish friends would hardly have recognised him under such altered conditions—a Penruth reckless of money: a Penruth throwing about sovereigns as if they were so much scoria, the mere refuse of the mine.

Clever doctors and good nursing had cured the fever; but when the fever was gone the patient was left at the lowest point compatible with the hope of recovery. There was the fear that she might go into a decline, the doctors told Mr. Penruth; so at their advice he took her off to the shores of Lake Leman, where she gazed with saddest eyes upon some of the fairest scenes earth can show, and where her power to live, or rather to endure life, came slowly back to her. She was still weak and fragile—a poor, pale, fainting creature for a man to be proud of, and the consciousness of this vexed Vyvyan Penruth sorely on this night of his home-coming.

She sat by the open lattice, looking out at the distant tords, wondering whether she would ever grow fond of that wild sweep of moor, those low oaks and firs, blown all one way by boisterous Atlantic breezes; wondering still more whether she would find any one to be kind to her in that strange home.

Her husband had been good to her with an exceeding goodness. Yet she feared him and shrank from him, even in her own thoughts.

CHAPTER XVIII.

MARK'S MISTAKE.

How would Mark Penruth take his brother's marriage? That was what people asked each other down in Camelot, the little town yonder, across the hills, in the hollow beyond the bridge, where there had been a great battle fought in the time of King Arthur, and where the corn grew tall above men's bones, and the skulls of nameless heroes, and, perchance, a jewelled crown or two that had not been found after the fight. To the eye of the traveller from more populous places, Camelot looked infinitely dull and empty of human interest; yet, to the native, it was the world in little, and its interests were of the widest.

Mark spent a considerable part of his existence at Camelot. It was near the quarries—much nearer than the good old stone mansion on the moor. When he worked late at his books he found it more convenient to spend the night at Camelot—where, as Vyvyan knew, there was a comfortable inn—than to ride across the moor to Place. The only intimate friends he had lived at Camelot. He knew people at Launceston, but that was

comparatively remote. His chosen companions were **certain** choice spirits, who were the life and soul of Camelot. They met nightly at the King's Arms—they had interests in common, their own particular style of discourse, almost a language of their own. They could converse for a quarter of an hour in nods and shrugs and half-finished sentences, and innuendoes which would have been incomprehensible to an outsider. They were not effusive in their friendship. They rarely shook hands with each other. Their affection satisfied itself with a curt nod by way of greeting. Yet if any one of the little circle had dropped out of it, there would have been a blank which all would have felt. There would have been no loud lamenting, but a deep regret, an empty chair which no mushroom acquaintance could ever fill.

To be appreciated in Camelot, a man's father and grandfather must have been born in the town. Granted this, and it did not much matter what the grandfather and father had been, or even what the man was. If they had been scamps, and he resembled them, society took a lenient view of his delinquencies, for the sake of 'auld lang syne.' He belonged to the place; his vices had grown up on that peculiar soil; and a vicious native, with generations of faulty natives behind him, was ever so much better than an immaculate new-comer.

Mark Penruth was popular at Camelot. Everybody knew him. The middle-aged people remembered what he had been as a boy, and the old people remembered his father and grandfather. He had never been long away from the town, and was as much a part of existing things as the clock over the market-place, or the sign of the King's Arms. This in itself would have been enough for popularity; but Mark had higher claims. He was free-handed with his money. He rode well, and was a good judge—or was supposed to be a good judge—of horses and dogs. He talked like a veterinary surgeon, and kept a hospital in a back yard not far from Camelot for his friends' ailing dogs. He played a good game of billiards, and was great at skittles. Generally he was considered a highly accomplished person; and there was a feeling that he would have made a much better squire than the sullen and somewhat churlish Vyvyan.

It had been taken for granted, as the years went on, that Vyvyan would die a bachelor, and leave Mark master of everything; and that in those latter days would follow a kind of millennium, or blessed period of peace and plenty, for all Mark's chosen friends. Mark was his brother's junior by only eleven years, and this did not leave a wide margin for the millennium; but the popular idea was that Vyvyan would 'go off suddenly one of these fine days,' and Mark would come in for the property. The gaunt bony figure of the elder brother was not suggestive of robust health; and, again, people think the thing they wish.

But now Vyvyan had brought home a young wife, and Mark's chances stood at zero.

It was the evening after Vyvyan's arrival at Place, a sultry July evening, and there was hardly a breath stirring in low-lying Camelot. The usual set of loungers occupied the open space in front of the King's Arms,—Marston, the attorney; Didcott, the surgeon and parish doctor, who had succeeded, as by prescriptive right, to exactly the same position his father had held before him, and who was allowed to cure or kill people, not because he was clever, but because his name was Didcott; Joe Nichols, the vet, whose ancestors were supposed to have been veterinary from the days when Athelstane drove the fierce Cornu-Britons across the Tamar, and fixed the boundary of their land for evermore. With these three gentlemen, half within his doorway and half without, stood William Lanherne, the landlord of the inn, and a person of considerable importance in the town, representing the conservative spirit in its most stubborn development. His had been the loudest voice in that clamour which kept the railway remote from sacred Camelot. It was he who opposed the building of a chapel of ease for those feeble townsfolk who did not care to walk three-quarters of a mile to their parish church. It was he who objected to gas in the street-lamps, and who ridiculed all sanitary improvements in the workhouse on the hill yonder, arguing that the paupers had got on well enough in his father's time without such new-fangled trumpery.

'Take my word for it, he's known all about it for the last six months,' said Lanherne, continuing a conversation about Mark Penruth, which had been meandering slowly through a desert of commonplace, with intervals of tobacco and silence. 'There's been something on his mind for a long time, and I daresay it's been the notion of his brother's getting married and cheating him out of the estate.'

'Don't you think it might be something else?' asked Joe Nichols, the veterinary surgeon, who never agreed with anybody. 'Don't you think *she's* on his mind?' he added significantly, with a knowing jerk of his head 'up street.'

'Not a bit of it,' said Lanherne; 'that's an old business.'

'But the Squire will find out all about it some day, and then there'll be a rumpus.'

'I don't see why the Squire should cut up rough,' said Marston. 'It's no business of his. If Mark had married her it would have been a different thing. He'd have got himself cut off with an angry shilling.'

'Ah,' sighed the landlord, 'it 'ud have been a bad business if he'd married her. She was an artful one, she was, and was capable of bringing him to it if she'd set her mind on it. But I suppose she didn't.'

'She was the best barmaid you ever had, William,' said Nichols. 'There's not been half as much life about your place since you lost her.'

'She was a sprightly little maid enough,' grumbled Lanherne, 'but a devil of a temper. I don't envy Mark his bargain.'

'He sticks to her, though, don't he?' mused the lawyer. 'It's close upon ten years now. Strange that the Squire has never found it out.'

'What a blessed innocent you are, Marston! The Squire knows as much as the wisest of us, and he knows it isn't his place to interfere. He's got a brother who can manage the quarries, and that's all he cares about. And now that he has a young wife he'll care less. Mark has made his bed, and he'll have to lie upon it. She'll never let go of him.'

There was a general shaking of heads, and a significant twitching of eyebrows, and then another lapse into friendly silence. The sun was going down behind the edge of that low hill, whereon stood about the only building that Camelot had any right to be proud of, a comfortable-looking Union. By and by the stars would peep out, first one by one, and then in a host beyond all power of reckoning, through the translucent evening gray; and the chosen spirits of Camelot would go in-doors and play a game of billiards, making an elaborate study of angles, and putting their bodies into every degree of crookedness, with infinite solemnity, oppressed by the vivid recollection of every game that had been played on the same rusty green cloth for the last six weeks.

As the rosy light grew wan behind the green crest of garden and paddock, Mark Penruth rode slowly down the narrow street on Pepper and Salt, his last equestrian treasure, called for brevity Pepper. He flung the bridle on this iron-gray animal's neck, and got off before the inn-door; whereupon Pepper, who divided his life pretty equally between the big rambling stables at Place and the old rat-haunted coaching-stable at the King's Arms, walked off of his own accord to meet the ostler, knowing that his day's work was done.

'That gray of yours looks uncommonly well,' said Joe Nichols.

'There isn't a better horse in Cornwall; his legs are as fine as a racer's.'

'He's cap-hocked,' said the vet. 'It isn't much, I know; but it would take off his value if you wanted to sell him.'

'I don't want to sell him,' grumbled Mark; 'and if I did I shouldn't come to you for his character.'

'Come, I say now, Mark, I've put you up to some good things in my time.'

'Yes; and let me in for a good many bad ones.'

'You're in a precious grumpy humour to-night, Mark,' said Marston. 'I suppose it's the pretty young wife upsets your digestion.'

'No, she doesn't, as it happens. I bear no malice against her, poor thing. She looks as if she hadn't six months' life in her; and if she was ever so strong I should think that old house would be the death of her in a year. I've been poring over accounts all day, and that's enough to make any fellow savage.'

'Trade thriving, I suppose,' suggested Joe Nichols, by way of saying something.

'Trade going to the dogs. The building trade was never so stagnant, and when there's no building nobody wants slates. We shall have to shut up our quarries before we're many years older.'

'Your brother won't like that.'

'Of course not. But I didn't come here to talk of the quarries. Who's for a game of billiards? You and Didcott owe Marston and me our revenge for last night, Nichols.'

The two doctors, human and equine, were ready to give their adversaries every opportunity; so they all four repaired to the billiard-room, a low-ceilinged apartment which had been used for eating and drinking in the prosperous old coaching-days, and never had got rid of that concentrated essence of beef and cabbage which is apt to hang about public dining-rooms. This perfume of the past, mingled with the odour of stale tobacco, was an uncomfortable change from the cool summer night; but custom had made the tainted air of that stuffy billiard-room sweet and pleasant in the nostrils of Camelot society. There was a solemn chalking of cues and a nice study of angles before each player ventured on a stroke, and though the game lasted an hour and a half, there was very little time for conversation during its progress. But there was ample leisure for the consumption of brandy-and-water and bottled cider. Mark Penruth drank brandy-and-water, and drank more brandy and less water than Mr. Didcott, the surgeon, would have approved in his professional character; although in his quality of bosom friend and boon companion he offered no objection. When the lamplit room was getting suffocatingly warm, and the stars were looking calmly down at Camelot from the depths of a dark-purple heaven, as if they had never seen anything better, Mark finished the pint of brandy which he had been sharing with his friend the lawyer, who drank modestly and paid nothing, and bade his companions a brief good-night. Camelot men never wasted time or words on ceremony.

'Ta-ta!' said Mark; and walked straight out of the billiard-room and up the hill towards the Union.

This noble building stood at the junction of two roads. Mark

took the one which did not lead towards Penruth Place, and walked along slowly, swinging his hunting-crop and looking at the ground.

It was a good old country lane between tall hedgerows. The landscape round Camelot was pastoral and fairly cultivated, altogether different from the wild sweep of moorland at the base of the two great tors. Camelot was sunk in a cultivated valley, and all around were cornfields and green pastures, not so rich or so lovely as those of the sister-county, but fair too look upon after their kind.

To Mark every inch of ground between Penruth and Camelot was as familiar as St. James's-street to a club lounge. The scenes of his childhood and youth had no particular charm for him ; but he accepted them as a portion of his life, almost as a part of himself, and he could hardly have endured existence away from them.

To-night he was far from happy in his mind, and Nature, to which he was equally indifferent at all times, exercised no soothing influence on his perturbed spirits. He cut at the tender young hedgerow ferns, the tall red foxgloves, savagely with his heavy leather hunting-thong as he walked by the tangled green banks, where a thousand living things were startled out of their slumbers by his violence.

About half a mile from the Union he came to a cottage standing in a good-sized garden, such a cottage as a farm-bailiff might have occupied—a substantial square stone building, with a heavy slate roof, the slates cut in clumsy slabs like paving-stones. Beautified by a luxuriant growth of fuchsia and myrtle, rose and woodbine, the cottage was not a bad place in the sunshine. To-night there was nothing to be seen but the shadowy porch, five blank windows, and one lower casement dimly lighted.

Mark walked up the narrow garden-path, between tall sun-flowers and hollyhocks, and opened the door with the air of a master. There was a door on each side of the narrow passage. He went into the room where he had seen the light.

'Late as usual, and boozing at the King's Arms as usual, no doubt,' said the inmate of the room, by way of welcome.

It was not an agreeable greeting ; but Mr. Penruth seemed accustomed to the kind of thing. He threw himself down on the old-fashioned sofa, covered with the gaudiest chintz that money could buy, and began to fling about the hard little bolsters and knitted antimacassars with which the sofa was provided.

'You needn't tumble the things like that. Goodness knows I slave hard enough to keep the place nice,' complained the voice that had just welcomed him.

It was not a whining voice—it was sharp and vinegary rather than doleful ; and it belonged to a pretty woman, a woman with

bright black eyes—a thought too bright for ideal beauty—sharply-cut nose and chin, glossy dark hair brushed back from a square resolute brow, a buxom figure, inclining a little to the dumpling order, a neat foot, a well-shaped hand. A pretty woman undoubtedly, and the kind of woman who is tremendously aware of her good looks, and believes in the divine right of beauty.

Put her side by side with Barbara, and a poet or a painter would say that the two women could hardly be inhabitants of the same planet. Yet there are people who would admire the sharp-nosed black-eyed lady, popularly known as Mrs. Peters, more than Barbara Penruth.

Mark took his time to answer the attack, the while Mrs. Peters shut her workbox with an angry slam, and locked it sharply with a trumpery little key, as if it held priceless treasures.

‘I’ve had a glass or two of brandy-and-water,’ he said at last, in a lazy voice, ‘and I’ve played a game of billiards with Nichols and Didcott and Marston, and I’ve spent exactly an hour and a half at the King’s Arms ; and as that’s about the only amusement I have in life, it’s hard if I can’t do as much without being called over the coals.’

‘You might have come home last night,’ said the lady, nothing mollified.

‘No, I mightn’t. The bride and bridegroom were expected, and I was obliged to do the civil.’

‘What’s she like?’

‘A pretty woman, but sickly. She was very ill while they were abroad.’

‘Serve her right, a shameful creature, selling herself to an elderly man that she can’t care twopence for, and coming between my children and their rights ! I hope it was her guilty conscience that made her ill. I should like to give her a bit of my mind.’

‘Now, Molly,’ pleaded Mark, with an anxious glance at the door, as if he thought there might be listeners, even in that quiet place. ‘You know it’s part of our bargain that—’

‘That I should hold my tongue till it pleases you to give me leave to speak. Don’t I know that ? I made a promise, and I’ve kept it ; though it has cut me to the quick to be looked down upon by all Camelot.’

‘You’re not looked down upon. Who has ever said an uncivil word to you ?’

‘It’s not what they say,’ retorted Mrs. Peters moodily ; ‘it’s what they think.’

‘What need you care for their thoughts ? You’ve got a house of your own, and a servant of your own, and a good gown to your back, and my trap to drive in whenever you want a drive

You're a precious deal better off than when you were barmaid at Lanherne's.'

'No, I'm not,' said Molly, with conviction; 'for then everybody in the place knew I was a prudent young woman, and now they don't.'

'I don't know what you call prudence,' grumbled Mark, waxing savage. 'You were a most audacious flirt.'

'I gave everybody as good as they brought; but you never heard of my walking out with a mortal soul till I walked out with you.'

Mark sighed, and let his thoughts slip back to the past. Too well he remembered those pleasant summer evenings, eleven years ago, when he and the barmaid from the King's Arms had strolled together by the ferny banks, and prattled of those nothings which make up the talk of commonplace lovers. Too well he remembered how he had praised her eyes and her nose and her mouth; and how from compliments they had come to kisses—not too quickly, for Molly knew how to keep a gentleman sweetheart at arm's length—and from kisses to promises, till that one fatal promise was given which had been a blight and burden to Mark Penruth ever since.

The promise had been faithfully kept, for Mark was yielding and Mary Somers was resolute; and the summer after that sunshiny period of courtship in green lanes, Mary, who had disappeared from the ken of Camelot for some time, returned as suddenly as she had vanished, and established herself in the cottage on the St. Columb road. The cottage was newly papered and painted, and a Launceston upholsterer sent over a vanload of smart furniture, which became at once and for ever the chief delight of Mary's soul. She told her old acquaintance that she had been staying at Plymouth, and that she had married a commercial traveller called Peters; and after having volunteered this information, she favoured her more particular friends with a presentation to a very pink baby, in a still pinker bassinet.

Years went by, and Mrs. Peters continued to occupy the house on the St. Columb road. More babies were gradually introduced to Camelot society, or rather to that portion thereof in which Mrs. Peters moved; but in all those years nobody was ever so fortunate as to make the acquaintance of Mr. Peters, or to behold that gentleman in the flesh. He came and went like the wind, which bloweth whither it listeth. People heard his wife talk of him, but nobody ever saw him.

'My husband is very reserved,' Mary told her particular friend, Mrs. Plumtree, at the Golden Lion.

'Yes,' said Plumtree, when the remark was reported to him; 'he's so reserved that there ain't a mortal in Camelot as ever laid eyes on him. He's uncommon clever at hiding, that fellow.'

She met him in Plymouth, she says, and it was there they were married. Well, I know a good few in Plymouth, and I've asked every one of 'em if they ever met with a bagman by the name of Peters, and there's not one as ever has. Ask her to show you her marriage-lines, my lass, and see how she takes it.'

'Lor', Plumtree, why should I up and insult her? Marriage-lines, indeed! She's a good customer to us, and she pays for all she has. What do I want with her marriage-lines? When I told you them words of hers, I was only talking for the sake of talking.'

'That's what you very often do, my dear. Well, it don't much matter. Poor young woman! She's like one o' them fabbylous burds as stick their heads in the sand and fancy nobody can see 'em. Peters, the commercial traveller, is Mark Penruth, and everybody in Camelot knows that as well as that the town-clock is twenty minutes behind London time.'

'Some say that he's married to her.'

'Some say stuff and nonsense. Mark Penruth may be a fule, but he ain't such a fule as that.'

This was the general style of Camelot conversation when Mrs. Peters was the subject of discussion. The lady herself was sharp enough to guess exactly how people would think and talk about her, and this knowledge was galling. Even a clean conscience would not sustain her against the tormenting knowledge that she was thought lightly of 'up town.'

'And when you do condescend to come home to your wife and family,' pursued Mrs. Peters, with a snappish emphasis on the word 'wife,' 'you are *that* disagreeable and *that* gloomy—'

'Don't nag, Molly. You're such a good hand at it that it's natural you should like doing it; but don't nag to-night, my girl. I've had a worrying day in the business.'

'All your days are worrying days, as far as I can see. You've had the miserables for the last twelve months. It's the brandy you drink at the King's Arms. I know what old Lanherne's brandy is; perhaps if you did, you wouldn't burn your inside with it. That's what gives you the miserables, Mark, not the business. Why need you worry about the business, I should like to know? You do your work and you get your wages. Whether things go right or wrong can't make much difference to you.'

'But it does make a difference—a tremendous difference! If things go wrong at the quarry it will be my ruin. I wonder whether you'd stick to me, Molly, if I were a beggar?'

'Stick to you!' echoed Molly indignantly; 'why, I should be obliged to stick to you. You needn't be afraid of that; you've got me fast enough—as fast as the law of the land can bind me.'

'But suppose I was a ruined man—a disgraced man?'

'I'm not going to suppose any such thing, and I'm not going

to encourage you in the miserables. If this is what bad brandy can bring a man to, thank God I'm sober. And now if you want any supper, I'll lay the cloth. There's the bladebone of as pretty a little shoulder of lamb as you ever set eyes on, and I've washed a lettuce and a handful of spring onions ready for a salad.'

'Thank you, Molly. No, I couldn't eat anything,' answered Mark, casting about the bolsters in profoundest melancholy.

'No,' snapped Mary; 'people who give their minds to drinking never can eat like healthy Christians. You're doing your best to dig your own grave, Mark.'

'You won't mend matters by preaching sermons,' grumbled Mark. 'How are the children?'

'O, they're well enough, poor little souls. They can't look into the future. They don't know that their uncle has got married, and that the finest estate in Cornwall has passed away from them, and left 'em face to face with the Union.'

'They've no right to complain. Suppose my brother chooses to marry, and suppose Providence sends him half a dozen stalwart sons, as tall and as gaunt as himself, we've no right to grumble.'

'But I say we have a right to grumble. Haven't I put up with everything—with being looked down upon in the place where I've lived half my life, and no one but a woman knows how hard that is to bear—for the sake of the future, so that my boy might be squire and master at Place by and by? And now there's a young wife, and before we're a year older there'll be a baby, perhaps—who knows?—and my boy will be a beggar. There's no call for me to hold my tongue any longer; I may just as well speak out and claim my due.'

'Molly,' cried Mark, in a deadly fright, 'don't talk like that! You wouldn't break your promise, would you, my girl?'

'I don't see as the promise is binding now your brother has gone and got married.'

'It is binding; it was a solemn promise. I should never have done what I did if you hadn't sworn to keep my secret. If you blab I shall be a beggar, turned off at the quarries.'

'And turned out of your soft nest at Place, where you keep your hunters, and play the gay bachelor, while me and mine are wearing our hearts out here.'

'Nonsense! My three bonny boys aren't wearing their hearts out; they're healthy and happy enough little ruffians.'

'Yes, poor little innocents, because they know no better. The truth will come upon them like a thunderclap, some day.'

'If any harm come to them, it will be their mother's doing. As long as you hold your tongue, Molly, all will go right—most likely.'

'Who said I wasn't going to hold my tongue? But I'm not going to be treated as a cipher. If you want me to stand by

you, you must trust me. You come home here and groan and chuck the sofa-cushions about, and you never tell me what's the matter with you.'

'There's nothing the matter. Of course I'm disappointed about this marriage, as well as you, though I don't talk so much.'

'No, you were never a talker. But now that your brother's got married himself, don't you think he'd be more indulgent and take things easy if you was to tell him—'

'I'll never tell him. Don't think that you'll drive me to it, Molly. I told you that you'd have to keep your secret as long as Vyvyan lives; and if you break the promise you made me—Well, there's no use talking; but I can tell you this, Molly: if you drive me to it, I'll chuck myself into the sea some fine morning, and make an end of my troubles.'

CHAPTER XIX.

'ON SOME WILD DOWN ABOVE THE WINDY DEEP.'

THE strong breath of the Atlantic, the perfect restfulness of her life at Penruth Place, did for Barbara what the smiling shores of Lake Lemman and the vaporous valley of Interlaken had failed to do. The sweet wild-rose bloom came back to her cheek, the lustre to her eyes. If the dull permanent pain of despair, which poets call a broken heart, were of itself fatal, Barbara would have surely died. But she carried her grief about with her, she bore her burden in silence and resignation, and she went on living. Interest in life she had little. The grand old Cromwellian house was beautiful in her eyes, but it only seemed to her like a house in a picture. It had no part in her own life. She never thought of it as home. Home was the cottage in South-lane; the cosy little rooms,—O, how small they seemed looking back at them from her present grandeur!—the half acre of garden, the familiar chairs and tables, amidst which she had grown up. Those things must ever remain unutterably dear.

Her husband was very kind to her—kind in his own grim way, which was like harshness in other people. The grating voice, with its loud bass tones, startled her a little in these days, when her nerves were very weak. But she knew that, after his own peculiar fashion, he was good to her, good and forbearing, since he had told her how in her fever and delirium she had raved about her first lover.

'I think if I had known how fond you were of that soldier I should hardly have been fool enough to marry you, besotted as I

was about you from the hour we met,' he said one day, when he had been talking of her illness.

'I told you that I had loved him with all my heart,' she faltered meekly.

'Had loved? Yes. But I believed it was a thing of the past.'

'It was past, quite past. We had given each other up. But when I was ill the old days came back, just as earlier days came back sometimes in those long dreadful nights, and I fancied myself a child again, playing at childish games with Flossie. You must not think of anything I said while I was ill, Vyvyan. Past and present were all in a tangle.'

'Well, it's not worth thinking about, perhaps. You were very bad. It was not a lively honeymoon.'

'I am sorry I gave you so much trouble.'

'Egad, I believe falling in love is all trouble. I would not give you up now I have got you; but I know I was a happier man before I saw your face.'

This was not a pleasant way of looking at things. Vyvyan had yielded to a fascination that was stronger than himself. The stern nature had been subjugated by a girl's grace and beauty as by a spell. He submitted, but he was angry with himself for submitting. He looked upon his love and his marriage as a fatality. If Barbara had loved him he would have bowed to Fate, and rejoiced in his bondage. He would have been the most devoted, the most yielding of husbands. This rugged old tree would have bent like the tenderest sapling. But Barbara did not love him, and she was too frank to affect a love she could not feel. She was gentle and obedient, grateful for his kindness, but there her measure of duty ended. She had no idea that duty could constrain her to pretend affection.

She bore her new honours with a gentle humility which ought to have disarmed her foes. Even Priscilla could find no cause for complaint, though she had been compelled to hand over her cherished housekeeping keys, and to sink into a subordinate position in a house where she had been sole mistress so long.

Strange for Barbara, whose only notion of an establishment was the all-comprehensive Amelia, to find herself mistress of half a dozen women-servants and as many men, indoor and outdoor. The middle-aged butler, who had washed spoons and glasses in his boyhood in the same pantry where he now decanted his wine and read his newspaper, took kindly to the young wife; not so much for the love he bore her as for his honest dislike of Priscilla. That lady's spiritual views had weighed heavily on the whole household. She had been a sworn foe to followers, to all kitchen revelries. She had been hard as the granite of her native hills. And now, under the dominion of a young wife, the

servants felt that things would be differently managed. There would be a slackening of the reins.

Little as he spent upon himself, and hard as he was in all business transactions, Vyvyan Penruth was liberal in his ideas as a master. He had been brought up to consider a house full of servants as part of himself—not for rank and state, but for old time-honoured custom. His father had kept so many servants, and he would keep the same number. He did not give large wages. Labour was cheap in that remote western world, but he would have no stint in his kitchen and servants' hall.

It had been in vain that his sister had told him there were more cats than could catch mice.

'I like to see the cats about the place,' he said. 'It's I who have to pay for them. You needn't trouble.'

'I am too conscientious not to be troubled by wasteful ways and idleness, which are pernicious to soul and body,' retorted Priscilla.

'Idleness! Why, there's no one in the house so idle as you,' growled her brother. 'You do nothing but write twaddling letters to other old tabbies, and read pious books.'

'I am trying to prepare myself for a world where I shall have many things that are denied me here, Vyvyan; and where I shall be better understood,' said Miss Penruth, with dignity.

Barbara's chief pleasure at Penruth Place was the flower-garden. That was a real delight. To inhabit a land where roses and myrtle grew and flourished, as they grew and flourished here, was almost as good as being a princess in a fairy tale. When her husband saw that she was fond of flowers he gave her an extra gardener.

'Have as many men about as you like,' he said; 'so long as you leave my sister her dahlia-garden, you can do what you please with the rest. If you'd like a hothouse I'll build you one, so that you may have flowers to ornament your rooms in winter.'

'You are very good,' murmured Barbara, wondering as she always wondered at his rough kindness, knowing how little she had done to deserve it. 'I don't want to give you any trouble.'

'It will be no trouble. I shall just order a man to come from Launceston and build a hothouse. Coles, your new gardener, knows all about it. Since you don't want to make any alteration in the house, you may as well have your own way in the garden. Fine roses these yellow ones, aren't they?' he went on, sniffing at a Marshal Niel. 'Do you remember my bringing you a bunch of yellow roses once when you were ill? I had only seen you twice at that time, yet you had taken hold of my life. I was miserable about you.'

Did she remember? Could she ever forget that wretched time, when she was lying sick to death with sorrow? The sight

of yellow roses brought back the old pain. She could see Flossie bouncing into the room and flinging the flowers on her bed.

'I want to make you happy if I can,' pursued her husband, this being one of his rare moments of confidence. 'I am glad you are satisfied with the old house as it stands, and the old furniture, which has been in it ever since Cromwell's time.'

'Satisfied!' echoed Barbara. 'Have you forgotten the home I came from—the secondhand chairs and tables and odd bits of china, and the cottage-piano at Camberwell? And yet that is my ideal of a home. I have the same kind of feeling about it, I suppose, that a bird has about his nest—mere twisted wisps of grass and bits of twigs and scraps of wool, yet it is his highest notion of comfort.'

'I hope you will get to like Place as well as you liked Camberwell.'

'Perhaps in time; but I must grow to it, you see. I know that it is a grand old house, and exactly like an ogre's palace in a fairy tale.'

'And I am like the ogre?'

'You are a very good-natured ogre,' Barbara answered, with one of her rare smiles.

'I try to be. I try to make you happy. Do you know that I have ordered a new carriage for you? Mine were all dropping to pieces, worn out with long disuse. I have ordered a landau, and I am going to get you a pony-carriage, which you can drive yourself. I have told Mark to look out for a pair of ponies.'

'How generous you are!' cried Barbara, flushing with absolute pleasure; 'and how pleased my mother and Flossie will be—when—if—they come to see me!'

'Ah, by the way, you wanted them to come to you, didn't you? I remember your saying something about it. Let them come as soon as you like.'

Barbara stood on tip-toe and kissed him, the first spontaneous kiss she had given him since he had been her husband.

'Do you really mean it?' she cried, enchanted. 'May they really and truly come, and are you sure you won't mind?'

'Why should I mind? Have them here to-morrow if it will make you happy. I want to see you smile and to hear you laugh, as you did that first night at the play.'

'Ah,' sighed Barbara, with a sharp sudden pang, 'so many things have happened since then.'

'What things?'

'I have grown so much older.'

'Why, it's only a year ago.'

She wrote to her mother that night, a letter overflowing with love, and with a flavour of real happiness in it which her former

letters had never had, though she had made them elaborately cheerful. Writing home had been one of her chief consolations. She had described the house and garden, the tors, the moors, the leather, and granite, every feature of her new home; she had praised her husband; she had spoken kindly of good-natured sauntering Mark; she had even found a good word for Priscilla.

'She is very, almost painfully, religious,' she wrote; 'but I have no right to find fault with her for that, as no doubt she is thoroughly sincere. She has a fortune of her own, you know, quite independent of her brother's; so she has no motive for pretending.'

To-night she wrote in wild spirits:

'You are to come at once, darling—"directly minute," as old nurse used to say to us—as soon as ever rail and coach will bring you. I shall send my carriage to meet you at Launceston. Don't trouble about gowns or luggage of any kind; bring anything or nothing. Don't, for Heaven's sake, say you must have a week to get ready, as you usually do about everything, you dear slowcoach; but just put your brushes and combs in a carpet-bag, and come off at once! I have heaps of money, and we can buy all you want at Launceston, where the shops are very good, though not nearly equal to the Walworth-road. Ever dear one, I am so happy at the thought of seeing you after our first weary parting; and, O, how shall I ever let you go back to dear old Camberwell again? And I wonder how you will feel in this Cromwellian mansion, where nobody but servants is ever allowed to do any sweeping or dusting, and where all things go in a slow monotonous way, as if the house was managed by clockwork. And the gardens! Ah, those will delight you! But Flossie will call the place dull, no doubt, for there is not a single shop to look at on the moor; and I daresay she will get tired of the two big brown tors that are always staring at one solemnly, as much as to say, "You poor, contemptible, modern, evanescent creatures, *we* were here before the Flood; we shall be here at the day of judgment."

There was great rejoicing at Camberwell when Barbara's invitation came. Mrs. Trevornock and her younger daughter had been enjoying a delightful change of air at quiet little Broadstairs, with alternations of gaiety at Margate and Ramsgate; and the sea-breezes and novelty of life had helped to restore Mrs. Trevornock to perfect health and strength. But the grand restorative was that ease of mind which came from a secure future, and the delightful idea that Barbara was established for life in her rightful position, as a great lady. It never entered into her thoughts that she had done wrong in promoting her daughter's marriage with Vyvyan Penruth. She was not the kind of woman who would have deliberately sold her child into bond-

age. Yet she had been made somewhat uneasy now and then by the tone of her darling's letters, which, though studiously cheerful, did not breathe the spirit of happiness. The girl had written about outward things—of herself and her own feelings hardly at all—of her husband only a few words now and then, telling them that he had been very good to her. But now this letter was full of life and sunshine, as if written by the happy Bab of old days, before the coming of Captain Leland, before the beginning of love and sorrow.

There was a happy day of tremendous bustle, hurried starching and ironing, and packing of a new trunk and a new port-manteau, bought for the occasion; and then, early in the fresh September morning, Mrs. Trevornock and her daughter left South-lane in a four-wheel cab, on their way to the railway station.

'First class, of course, ma,' said Flossie, when she took her mother's purse to get the tickets, claiming all business transactions as her own especial province.

'I am afraid it would cost a great deal of money,' answered Mrs. Trevornock dubiously. 'Don't you think we could go to Exeter second class, and then take first-class tickets on to the station where we are to change to the coach?'

'That might be done, but it seems mean; and if we were to meet any one who knows Barbara and us—'

'So few people know us.'

'True. We are rather like poor La Vallière—violets that hide themselves in the grass; second class will do; and Flossie tripped briskly to the booking-office, and fought valiantly for her place in the rank, and came out of the struggle triumphantly with her two tickets and the correct change.

It was a very long journey, but a happy one; a feast of green fields and hill and valley, glimpses of distant woodland, winding streams, and rustic villages; and lastly, the grandeur of a wild range of pasture on the skirts of Dartmoor, over which they travelled in a good old-fashioned stage-coach, and then by pastoral Lidford, and woody Lifton, until they came to Launceston, where Barbara's own carriage had been sent to meet the travellers. It was an ancient britzka, much the worse for wear, which looked as if it had been built in the year one, as Flossie pertly observed, when she had established herself comfortably in the roomy back seat, with her bonnet-box, parasol, and umbrella, and divers minor parcels on the seat opposite her; but as Barbara was to have a new landau immediately, the shabbiness of the existing vehicle counted for nothing.

'Now I do feel thankful to Providence,' Mrs. Trevornock exclaimed piously; 'for I am sitting in my daughter's carriage, and the dream of my life is realised.'

'O,' said Flossie, 'then I suppose you have no dream to be fulfilled about poor little *me* and *my* carriage?'

'My dear Flossie, you know what a bright clever girl I think you. Nobody has ever denied your good looks; but Barbara's beauty is—well, really, you know—'

'Don't be apologetic,' said Flossie. 'I'm quite willing to admit Bab's superiority; but I should like to think there was a carriage—something better than this family ark, which positively smells of dry-rot—looming in the future for me.'

'Why not, dear?' said the sanguine mother; 'with such opportunities as Barbara can give you, you ought to make a splendid match.'

They were climbing slowly up the steep Launceston street by this time, and Flossie was looking eagerly right and left for bonnets and haberdashery.

'Bab may well call this place inferior to the Walworth-road,' she exclaimed at last; 'there's not a shop worth looking at.'

Half an hour later, Miss Trevornock found herself face to face with primeval Nature in the shape of the Cornish tors.

'What big brown things!' she exclaimed contemptuously, being of a temper which would not have been overawed by Mont Blanc. 'Are those the creatures your Tre, Pol, and Pen make such a fuss about? I expected to see them ever so much higher.'

Mrs. Trevornock's memory had wandered back to the distant past.

'When Mr. T. brought me to Cornwall after my honeymoon, the joy-bells were rung as our post-chaise drove through the village,' she said pensively.

'Then I hope pa was not expected to pay the ringers,' retorted Flossie, 'for I'm sure he wouldn't have done it.'

'No, dear; your grandmother paid for everything. She was the soul of generosity; and she welcomed me as lovingly as if I had been her own daughter. You don't remember your grandmother?'

'How should I, when I never saw her?' snapped Flossie. 'But I think she must have been a most extraordinary woman.'

'How so, dear?'

'For being so nice herself, and yet contriving to have such a son as Mr. T.'

'Ah, Flossie, there are anomalies in life,' sighed Mrs. Trevornock, with a philosophical air.

After about an hour's drive they came to the lodge-gates, and Mrs. Trevornock flushed with triumph as she entered her daughter's park. Her imagination, always fervid, had pictured a grander domain, larger timber, oaks as magnificent as those at Stoneleigh, beeches as fine as those of the New Forest, wooded glades dotted with deer. This sweep of upland pasture, with

its screen of stunted oak and Scotch fir, hardly came up to her expectations. But when they passed the boundary between park and garden, and approached the old house, gray and lichened, with its richly-mullioned windows looking out upon them like grave historic faces, the mother's breast swelled with rapture.

'What a noble mansion, Flossie!' she cried. 'It is like one of the show-places I used to be taken to see when I was a girl!'

But here was something that went nearer to the maternal heart than the mansion; here was Barbara herself, standing in the porch, in a white gown, waiting for her mother and sister. She ran to the carriage-door; she could hardly wait till the steady old coachman had pulled up his horses before her arms were round her mother's neck, and she was crying and laughing on her shoulder in a rapture of affection that was almost hysterical.

'My darling, what a century since I have seen you! And how well you are looking! Flossie too.'

'We had three weeks at Broadstairs, you know, dear,' explained Mrs. Trevornock, with joyful tears in her eyes.

'It was lovely,' said Flossie. 'Such stylish people; the band played every afternoon before the Albion; lodgings a fabulous price.'

Barbara led her mother into the house, that happy parent gazing at everything with awe and admiration.

'My dearest child,' she faltered, 'I never felt so proud in my life. Such a glorious old house! such a heavenly garden! What a good man your husband must be!'

'Yes,' sighed Barbara, 'he is all that is good.'

And then Mrs. Trevornock felt a gentle thrill of self-approbation. How wise she had been! how truly she had played a mother's part! and what a lucky stroke Flossie had made in losing that foolish letter, which would have spoiled everything!

'Providence has been very good to us,' she thought complacently.

'Flossie,' began Barbara, in a confidential tone, 'I hope you'll be very polite to Miss Penruth.'

'I'll do my best,' replied Flossie; 'but I have made up my mind to hate her. Of course she's the image of Mr. Penruth?'

'She's not in the least like him.'

'Then she ought to be,' retorted Flossie. 'It is a gross impertinence for the members of a family to set up an individuality of their own.'

'Will you come straight up to your rooms and get ready for dinner, or would you like a cup of tea first, mother darling?' asked Barbara.

People in this dark period of history contrived to exist with-

out the now indispensable five-o'clock tea; but Barbara felt that this was an occasion for special tea-drinking.

'I think a cup of tea would revive me,' said Mrs. Trevornock.

'You shall have it in your own room, dearest, and then you need not face Miss Penruth till you are refreshed.'

'I suppose you call her Priscilla?' suggested Flossie.

'I have not arrived at that yet.'

'Then you are getting on very slowly.'

They all three went up the dark old staircase in a loving cluster. Vyvyan and Mark were out; Priscilla was in the retirement of her own room, where she spent a considerable portion of her life reading, writing letters, labouring at some elaborate piece of fancy-work, or making coarse and homely raiment for divers ancient pensioners. Barbara and her guests had the house all to themselves. She took them to the rooms she had brightened and embellished for their occupation. There were flowers in abundance on mantelpiece and tables. The faded and sombre hues of the past made a harmonious background for the rich damask of roses, the vivid scarlet of geraniums.

Gilmore, Barbara's special favourite among the servants, a plump fair-haired young woman, brought the tea on a massive old silver tray—tea and sweet home-made biscuits and clotted cream and honey in the comb.

'I hope you don't expect me to eat any dinner, Bab,' cried Flossie, 'for I am going to enjoy myself now.'

'Gilmore will always answer your bell, mother,' said Barbara; 'she has promised to take especial care of you.'

'That I will, ma'am,' protested Gilmore, with a radiant grin. 'I'd do anything to please my mistress.'

'Is she your very own maid?' asked Flossie, when the affectionate Gilmore had vanished.

'Yes. She is the housekeeper's daughter, and was promoted from being under-housemaid to wait upon me. She is a most faithful devoted creature.'

'Fancy your having a maid of your own!' exclaimed Flossie; 'it is like a dream. What would Amelia think?'

'Poor good-natured little Amelia! Does she sing as much as ever?'

'More, now that she has more butcher's meat. I think she must eat it raw, like a blackbird. "Thou art gone from my—hi—gaze, like a beau-hoo-tee-ful dream!" all day long sometimes. It's rather trying when one's kitchen is within a stone's throw of one's parlour. Your servants here might be shouting nigger-choruses all day long, and you need not hear a note.'

Mrs. Trevornock reposed in the slumberous corner of an old-fashioned sofa, sipping strong tea, and contemplating her surroundings dreamily, too full of content for much speech.

Through the open lattice, the one practicable opening in the wide Tudor window, came the breath of land and sea, flowers and ocean-weeds. Yonder far away rose the Cornish mountains, remote, inaccessible save to a hardy climber. The grave old room was changed in nothing since the days when stern Cromwell held the helm of state, and New Place was a peaceful haven for the exiled King's adherents. What a contrast to the modern shabbiness of South-lane, Camberwell!

The comfortable little house, which till now had been a thing of beauty and a perennial source of pride, must henceforward seem ineffably shabby to Mrs. Trevornock. Yet there was no touch of envy mingled with her admiration. It seemed to her only the rightful order of things that Barbara should inhabit a noble old mansion, while her mother and sister dwelt far off in humility, and looked up to her from their remoteness as to a new Esther, glorified and beautified by her wealthy lord's surroundings. Mrs. Trevornock folded her hands, and felt that she had done her duty.

'What a dear ugly old teapot!' cried Flossie, pausing in her onslaught on the honeycomb. 'Silver, I suppose?'

'Yes; Mr. Penruth's plate is all silver.'

'Tray and all. It must weigh a hundredweight. And to think that *our* family plate is comprised by half a dozen teaspoons and our great-aunt Sarah's muffineer! And of all the articles that silversmiths ever invented, I think a muffineer is the most useless and unmeaning.'

Those were halcyon days for Barbara; a glorious September, a peerless October. Every eye in England was turned to the Crimea, every thought was of news from the seat of war; but Barbara heard of repulse or victory with but a languid interest. *He* was not there. Her soldier, her hero was far away in that remoter world, where battles as desperate and victories as grand had been fought and won for the last hundred years, with hardly an interval in the march of conquest. Sebastopol fell, and even in this far west there was ringing of bells, and bonfires were lighted and tar-barrels blazed gaily as on St. John's-eve; but Barbara was absorbed in the delight of her mother's society, and took the faintest notice of bells and bonfires. The rose-bloom had come back to her cheeks, the lustre to her lovely eyes. Vyvyan looked on and understood, with a bitter sense of wrong, her great capacity for loving, and her inability to love him.

'What affection she lavishes on mother and sister! how passionately she loved that Indian soldier! Yet to me she is cold as marble. What a besotted idiot I was when I married her!'

He had tried, according to his lights, to win her love: he had been kind, liberal, and indulgent, but he felt that he had failed. She was grateful; she gave him respect, obedience, deference, as

her part of the bargain ; but he was no nearer her heart than he had been when she yielded herself, shrinkingly, reluctantly, to his first kiss, the solemn kiss of betrothal.

'Fool, fool, fool !' he said to himself, in bitterest self-scorn ; and then he lapsed back into his old self, and was hard and grumpy and matter-of-fact as of yore—a man living within himself, and taking little delight in life.

Meanwhile Mrs. Trevornock and Flossie were revelling in all the good things of this world, dawdling away sunny mornings in a garden running over with roses, waxing sleek and fat upon much Cornish cake and Cornish cream ; going for long drives to choice bits of scenery, taking their luncheon with them, for the delight of eating uncomfortably among the slippery serpentine rocks where the gulls and cormorants lived, or on some breezy hill-top, swept by all the winds that blow across the wide Atlantic. Flossie inspected the neighbouring scenery, and turned up her small nose at the oldest established lions on the Cornish coast, making light of Tintagel, and expressing herself irreverently about Logan Stones, cromlechs, serpent-worship, and the Druids generally.

Miss Penruth had no share in these amusements. Barbara invited her politely and formally to take her seat in the family carriage, the new landau, roomy, substantial, and comfortable ; a carriage that would have held six as easily as it held four.

'I am not fond of long drives,' Priscilla replied stiffly ; 'I consider them a waste of life.'

'One must spend one's life somehow,' said Barbara, with a faint sigh.

'If we thought of our lives as talents for which we shall have to account, we should hardly spend them driving about to look at cliffs and rocks,' retorted Priscilla, with a wrathful glance at Flossie, whose very presence affected her as a scarlet flag affects an irascible bull.

'I don't think we shall find our account in the skies stand any the worse for the happy hours we have spent admiring the beauty of the earth,' protested this young lady.

'I cannot argue with flippancy,' said Miss Penruth.

'No one would ever accuse you of being flippant,' returned Flossie.

'I was talking of your flippancy, Miss Trevornock.'

'Then you ought to have made yourself clearer.'

There had been numerous skirmishes between the two ladies, Flossie generally getting the best of the argument, or, at any rate, by the pertness of her manner appearing to come victorious out of the fray. Never had Miss Penruth disliked any one so intensely ; and her capacity for dislike was large. Mark, on the contrary, had taken kindly to the lively Flossie. Her vivacity

amused him, and distracted him from those gloomy thoughts which had of late oppressed him. She was his ideal of agreeable young-ladyhood. He wondered at his brother's folly in choosing the elder sister. What was a little beauty more or less? Mark had found out by hard experience that well-cut features and a brilliant complexion will not of themselves alone make a man's fireside pleasant to him. His real need in life, did he but know it in time, is a cheerful sweet-tempered companion, light of foot over the stony ways of the world, with a spirit brave enough to face an occasional tempest, a mind sunnier than the sunshine when all is fair. Flossie seemed to Mark just this kind of girl. Her tongue was sharp, but her temper and heart were excellent.

'I suppose your mother-in-law and her daughter are settled here for life,' Priscilla said to her brother one day, when he happened to be at home at luncheon, and they two were lunching alone together, while Barbara and her guests were far afield. 'Mrs. Penruth seems so happy, and has changed so much for the better, as far as good spirits go, since they have come, that it would be a pity to send them away.'

'Yes, she is very happy with them,' Vyvyan answered moodily.

'Yet you could hardly have counted upon that when you married.'

'Counted upon what?'

'Upon having your mother-in-law fixed here for life.'

'She is not fixed for life; they are going home in a week or so,' answered Vyvyan; and he made up his mind that they should go.

CHAPTER XX.

LOOKING EASTWARD.

WITHOUT being actually a miser, Vyvyan Penruth was a man who set a high value on money. The habit of his life had been to spend very little, keeping a good establishment, but courting no society, caring for none of those things upon which the landed gentry are wont to spend their incomes. When the occasion came it gave him no pain to part with money; but to have been cheated out of a shilling would have given him real uneasiness. The people who knew him best called him a hard man. He had been adamant against the appeals of tenants in distress. He had made up his mind long ago—indeed it had been a fixed belief with his father before him—that most of the farms on the estate were under-rented; and he would show no indulgence to an unlucky tenant: come rain or sunshine, good harvest or bad

harvest, he must have his bond. He had no toleration for unlucky people, and was inclined to consider misfortune as a kind of blundering, indicative of inherent stupidity in the victim.

'I was not sent into the world to bear the burden of other people's blunders,' he would say.

He had inherited a large estate, large in land, which yielded at the best three per cent, rich in the quarries, which had been in years past a mine of wealth. Of late the profits from the quarries had been gradually diminishing, and during the last year they had lessened to an almost alarming extent. This state of affairs was so unpleasant to Mr. Penruth that he began, for the first time in his life, to be doubtful of Mark's excellence as a man of business, and to look with disapproval, and even suspicion, upon his brother's taste for field-sports and ardent love of the brute creation.

'I can't imagine what makes you so fond of horses,' he said to Mark testily one day, when he came into the stable-yard, and found his brother and the veterinary surgeon confabulating about a brown cob, which had just been trotted up and down for inspection. 'It isn't in the Penruth breed to waste money on four-footed beasts. I hope you don't bet.'

'I hope a man may be fond of a good horse without being a turf gambler,' answered Mark, with a vexed air. He had been curiously short-tempered of late. 'A fellow must amuse himself somehow in a dull hole like this.'

'If all I hear is true, you contrive to amuse yourself in more ways than one,' said the elder brother grimly, as he turned on his heel, with a curt nod to the veterinary surgeon.

When this conversation took place between the brothers, Barbara had been two years married, and it seemed to her as if the longer half of her life had been spent on this Cornish moor. Her mother and sister had paid her two visits in the two years, and on the second occasion Miss Penruth had retired precipitately from the field before the arrival of the enemy. When she heard that Flossie was coming she announced her intention of spending six weeks in Bath, to enjoy a course of sermons from a popular preacher.

'I suppose your sister will not be with you *longer* than six weeks!' she said to Barbara. 'Your mother would hardly like to abandon her house for an indefinite period.'

'They may possibly stay seven or eight weeks,' answered Barbara, colouring, 'if you call that an indefinite period. I did not make my invitation particularly definite. I did not tell them, So long shall you stay, and no longer. But why should you go away, Miss Penruth? Surely this house is large enough to hold us all?'

'It is not large enough to hold me and your sister,' retorted

Priscilla, in her sourest voice. 'If it were as big as St. Peter's at Rome, it would not be large enough for that.'

'I am sorry,' said Barbara, with a proud resignation, which her sister-in-law denounced as the acme of insolence.

So Mrs. Trevornock and Flossie came for their second visit to Place, and enjoyed the summer weather in that breezy world ever so far above the chimneypots of the highest house in Launceston. Mark softened wonderfully on this second occasion. He took Flossie under his wing, having found her passionately fond of animals and altogether a kindred spirit. He taught her riding, finding her a decent mount in one of his numerous disappointments in horseflesh—all his horses resulting sooner or later in abject failure, after a brief golden age of absolute perfection. Flossie proved herself fearless and clever, and delighted her instructor.

But just when everything up at Place was going merrily as marriage-bells, one of those malignant little birds that fly across even the fairest countryside conveyed the intelligence of Mark's carryings-on to a certain cottage outside Camelot, and the riding-lessons came to an abrupt end. Mark found his office-work so heavy that he took to spending four nights a week in his bachelor den at the quarries, and Flossie saw very little more of him.

'I actually miss him,' she informed her sister. 'In a civilised place like Walworth one would hardly be aware of his existence; but here he counts for something. At the worst he is a man.'

And now Barbara had been nearly three years a wife, and last summer and that holiday-time when her mother and sister were with her seemed ages ago. She and her husband were no nearer to each other than they had been in the beginning of things. Fate had ordered that they should be a childless couple. No tender domestic association had grown up to fill the place of the love that was not, and never had been, in the young wife's heart. Her husband shut himself up in his pride, as in a citadel. Yet he had no ground for complaint. His wife was dutiful; his wife was virtuous. She seemed even contented with her monotonous life, which was little better than hibernation when her mother and sister were not with her. Her obvious happiness in their society affronted him deeply. When they were gone it was as if a light had gone out of her, leaving her a soulless piece of humanity, the lamp without the flame.

'Isn't it a pity they can't be here always?' he asked her once, with veiled mockery.

'I should be very happy if they could.'

'I know that. But then, you see, I married you, and not all your family.'

She bowed her head meekly to this harsh truth.

'You have been very good to let them be here so much,' she said, laying her hand on his shoulder, as he sat at his desk with his face turned from her; 'and I am truly grateful to you. They may come again next summer, may they not? They enjoy themselves so much, and the air does my mother such good.'

'Yes, they may come once a year. You may have your spell of happiness once a year. They say that a good daughter makes a good wife. What a happy husband I ought to be!'

This speech was emphasised with a sardonic grin at his papers, and a sidelong glance of furtive anger at her.

'Vyvyan, are you angry with me?' she faltered.

'No,' he answered sternly, 'I am never angry with you; but I am often angry with myself.'

May came, and with the end of the month the news of the outbreak at Meerut. The Mutiny, not wholly unexpected by those who had power to read the signs of the times, came like a thunderclap upon England at large. Barbara read, and trembled as she read. She could find no mention of her lover's name in that tale of revolted regiments, of sudden and treacherous murder; but at any moment she might stumble upon the line that told curtly of his death. She opened the newspaper with a feverish eagerness, and yet trembled as she read. She watched from her bedroom window for the coming of the old messenger who brought the post-bag, with its daily tale of letters and papers, in the golden sunlight betwixt afternoon and evening. Yet she had to be cautious, to hide her impatience and her fears, knowing that Vyvyan was jealous of her Indian lover, and would be quick to suspect the cause of her anxiety. Happily for her peace of mind, Miss Penruth knew nothing of that old trouble.

'You seem interested in this Indian revolt,' Priscilla said one evening, when Vyvyan was dining at Launceston, and Barbara had been poring over her *Times* for the last hour, undisturbed by the distractions of society.

'It is so dreadful to think of helpless women and children in the power of those merciless wretches.'

'What can you expect from Hindoos and Mahometans? They ought to have been converted, and then this would not have happened.'

'I don't think, from what I have heard, that it is easy to make good Christians of them,' faltered Barbara.

'Of course not, because the right means have never yet been tried,' replied Miss Penruth, as confidently as if she were proprietress of an infallible specific for the conversion of all Hindostan.

Barbara held her peace and went on with her paper. Not till she had read every word of Indian news, every line of comment, was she satisfied. Then having read all, and found no mention

of George Leland's name, she thanked God for His mercy, and lay down to rest with a heart something less heavy than it had been at waking, yet with a dread of what the morrow might bring.

She was so intensely anxious, so completely absorbed by the fear of what each day might bring forth, that the idea of her mother's visit, which had until lately been her one star of hope, became now an unwelcome thought. She dreaded Mrs. Trevor-nock's searching eye, made wise by knowledge of the past; she shuddered at the thought of Flossie's inconsiderate gaiety. When Miss Penruth announced that she meant to spend October and November with friends at Plymouth, Barbara seized the excuse for deferring her mother and sister's coming.

'In that case I will ask mamma and Flossie to come to me in the autumn,' she said, 'and you will not be troubled by my sister's obnoxious presence.'

She thus secured for herself comparative solitude for this time of suspense and fear. And now, with the beginning of October, when the hunter's moon silvered the dark crest of the rugged brown tors, and the steady old plough-horses were creeping slowly over the uplands, and the purple heather was fading on the Gorse Moors, and the current of agricultural life flowed as smoothly as if there was no bloody tragedy being played out yonder under blue Indian skies, the name so loved, so dreaded, began to appear in the newspapers. Captain Leland, a man already famous for daring and energy, though of late under a cloud, had received orders to raise a regiment of irregular cavalry, which soon became historical as Leland's Horse. He took an active share in the siege of Delhi; he played an heroic part in the capture of the three rebel princes—human tigers—who had outraged helpless women, and wallowed in the blood of infants; remorseless scoundrels, whose pastimes were cruelties too hideous to be told. George Leland, at the head of a handful of men—barely one hundred—captured and boldly made prisoners of these royal reptiles, although supported by a fanatic and insurgent host five thousand strong. He brought his prisoners in a cart to one of the gates of Delhi, the rabble following and surrounding him all the way; and before the gate, seeing that a rescue was imminent, he ordered the rebel princes out of the cart, and slew them with his own resolute hand, dominating and overawing a savage multitude by the force of inexorable justice. There is no Roman story finer than that tale of the capture at Humayoon's tomb. Rebellious India never learned a sterner or a stronger lesson than was taught that day by an English captain, acting on his own responsibility.

Barbara read, and her heart thrilled at the thought of his peril, of his courage.

'O my hero, my hero!' she cried; 'what woman would not envy her whom you love? And you loved me once; yes, it was true love, true as your sword, true as your fidelity to England!'

The papers had told her much of her lost lover, much that had been dark to her hitherto. The world wanted to know what manner of man this soldier was who had come so suddenly to the front, and had shown a purpose and a power that would have been great in a veteran general. He had been under a cloud, it seemed. Three years ago, while commanding a corps of Guides on the frontier, he had been accused of negligent management with regard to the public money that had passed through his hands. He had entered upon his office hurriedly, without time for an audit between himself and his predecessor, and he had found all the affairs of the station an inextricable mass of confusion. He had tried, but ineffectually, to evolve order out of chaos. A special military court had investigated the charges against him; but by some social legerdemain the report which should have gone to the Governor-General was delayed for a year. A second report, demanded by Lord Dalhousie, was kept back by private influence till that nobleman had left India, while Leland's reputation withered in the cold shade of a quasi-disgrace. Later, two of the bravest generals and best men of business in the service investigated his regimental accounts, and testified unreservedly to the honour and uprightness of his conduct, as well as to his laborious industry.

His character had thus been pronounced stainless by men of unimpeachable honour; but not till he had languished for nearly three years under the blight of disapproval; deprived of his appointments, civil and military; doing journeyman's work as a subaltern in his regiment, and losing all chance of promotion. In his despair of being righted, he was on the point of setting out for Calcutta to make a desperate and final appeal for justice at head-quarters, when there came news of the outbreak at Meerut, and the Commander-in-Chief at once appointed the disgraced officer to an important position on his staff. George Leland thus regained in one leap all that he had lost. India was in a blaze, and no sane administrator could afford to lose the services of a man of tried courage, ability, and influence.

From that hour to the present his course had been marked by daring, capacity, and success. A man whose spirits never flagged in the face of the foe, who seemed to catch inspiration from danger and difficulty, and to be happiest when the situation was most desperate; quick in expedient, fearless in execution, like him of Arcot and Plassy, a born leader of men,—such was the Major Leland of Leland's Horse, now famous from Calcutta to Cabul, whose story Barbara read from day to day in the letters of war-correspondents.

This and much more Barbara read of her lost lover ; she read and wept over the story of his daring, his recklessness of danger, and an inexorable tenacity in the very jaws of death.

Now, clear and vivid as the fiery writing on the wall in days of old, the words of George Leland's letter stood out before Barbara with new force and meaning. This was the disgrace he had told her of, this unsifted suspicion of a misuse of public money ; this was why he had told her that the bond between them must be broken. He had seen himself a disgraced and ruined man, all chances of fortune and promotion gone from him, and his first impetuous act had been to set her free.

'But my letter, my letter !' she said to herself despairingly. 'Surely that was clear enough ; surely I told him plainly enough that I could trust in his honour against all the world ; that I feared no evil fortune, would shrink from no disgrace. And he did not even answer my letter !'

And then, freed from the humiliating idea that he had flung her off in order to marry some one else, she began to wonder if by any chance that letter, on which so much depended, had gone astray. Yet why should that be ? Of all her previous letters, two in every month, not one had ever been lost. Why should that one fateful letter have miscarried ?

No ; he had doubtless received her poor little letter, but having made up his mind he thought it kinder not to reply. He had resolved on this act of self-abnegation. He would let no woman share his evil fortune. And so he had kept silence, and had broken her heart.

She thought—with what deep regret !—of what her life might have been had he dealt frankly with her, had he told her his circumstances, and left her free to make her own choice. What bliss to have gone out to him, to have married him before the face of his slanderers and enemies, to have consoled him in those dark days of unmerited disgrace ! O fate ten thousand times happier than her brilliant fortune as Vyvyan Penruth's unloving wife. She would have faced all the dangers of those dreadful days yonder, boldly, proudly, by his side ; fearing nothing so that she might be near him in hour of peril. She did not know that while the husbands were wearing out their hearts in the desultory pot-shot warfare before the walls of Delhi, and were rather besieged than besiegers, the wives were far away in the hills, waiting for the post that might bring them tidings of woe.

So the autumn days grew sharper with the chill breath of coming winter ; the last sheaves were garnered, and Mark Penruth was tramping, gun in hand, over the brittle stubble, attended by his last failure in lemon-and-white setters—a dog of loveliest disposition, and the most delightful creature by the fireside, but feeble in his ideas, and irresolute in his conduct with fur and

weather. Miss Penruth had departed on her Plymouth pilgrimage, and Vyvyan had assented, not too graciously, to a third annual visit from Mrs. Trevornock and Flossie.

'Flossie is so fond of you,' Barbara said coaxingly, when she had discussed the invitation to her mother and sister; 'she has never forgotten your kindness in giving us all those theatretickets.'

'Has she not? No; nor have I ever forgotten those days,' Vyvyan answered, with a gloomy look.

There had been a settled moodiness in his manner and speech for a long time, and sweet words and gentle looks had lost their power to charm or soothe him. The proud sense of possession, the delight of having conquered, had worn off; and he felt that in marrying a wife who did not even profess to love him he had made a bad bargain. He forgot the terms of their betrothal, and resented his wife's indifference as a wrong for which he had been unprepared. Perhaps, had they two been alone together, things might have worn gradually round to a pleasanter state of feeling on his side and on Barbara's; but the pious Priscilla was a constant monitor, a perpetual explanatory note, setting forth the glaring fact of this young wife's unworthiness.

Once, when driven somewhat hard in argument by her brother, who had suddenly demanded to be informed what it was she had to blame in his wife, Miss Penruth replied meekly,

'If you find no fault in her, Vyvyan, I am not going to find fault. She is neither respectful nor agreeable in her manner to me, but *that* is a minor detail. Perhaps she wishes me away; indeed, I have no doubt she does; but so long as my presence here adds to *your* happiness'—Vyvyan gave a faint groan, but he was standing with his back to his sister, staring absently out of window, and she may not have heard him—'I shall remain, at any sacrifice of my own feelings. No, Vyvyan, I have no fault to find with Mrs. Penruth. So long as you can trust her, so long as you approve of her conduct, my lips are sealed.'

'And if I disapproved, if your lips were unsealed, what could you find to say against her?' demanded Vyvyan hotly. 'Isn't her life quiet enough and humdrum enough to please any one? Why, the cattle yonder, dragging the plough over the ridge of the hill, hardly do their duty in a more methodical manner than my wife. Is she not obedient, gentle, attentive to me even, in her quiet way?'

'I admit all that, Vyvyan, and if you are satisfied I have not a word to say,' replied Miss Penruth, with an air of self-abnegation that made her brother feel murderous.

'But I tell you that if I were dissatisfied you could find no word to say against her,' he retorted. 'Her conduct does not admit of blame.'

‘Negatively, I admit, she is an admirable person. She **does** not turn your house out of windows or squander your money ; but, if it had been my lot in life to marry, I should have expected something more from a husband than you have ever received from Barbara.’

Here the argument ended. It was the only actual dispute that had ever arisen between Miss Penruth and her brother on the subject of his married life. In a general way the lady had restricted herself to innuendoes and gentle hints which could hardly be met in argument. They were apt to fall unheeded on her brother’s ear at the moment, and to crop up in his memory unpleasantly afterwards, like some foul weed whose feathery imperceptible germ the light summer wind has wafted across the country.

And now Miss Penruth had gone forth, with two huge trunks and a bonnet-box, to adorn and dazzle the serious circles of Plymouth and its environs, and Barbara had her mother and sister with her once again. But these days were not like those peaceful days of the past, when she had given herself up unreservedly to the delight of her mother’s society. She was weighed down with ever-present fears of what might happen in India.

The papers of late had been silent about Major Leland. The public attention was concentrated upon the sufferers at Lucknow, and the general who was marching to their relief. That one hero, who represented for Barbara all that earth held of valour, seemed to have disappeared from the stage where this awful tragedy was being acted. She did not know that he too was travelling towards the beleaguered city, with his sturdy band, accomplishing marvels of valour on the way. He was but one brave soldier among many. She could only wait, dumb, helpless, fearful lest, on some bitter never-to-be-forgotten day, she should see his name in the list of the slain.

Not a word did Mrs. Trevornock or Flossie say of Major Leland, though they could hardly have missed the story of his deeds in the daily papers. With a laudable caution they avoided all mention of the Indian Mutiny, though it was the one absorbing thought in the minds of men and women at this time. Mrs. Trevornock and her daughter behaved as if there had been no such thing—as if Campbell and Havelock had never lived, and Lucknow had never been heard of. There had been discovered during the last week the hideous evidence of one of those mysterious crimes which sometimes appal society ; and Flossie would talk of no public event save this ghastly discovery of a carpet-bag containing human remains. She dwelt and enlarged upon this horrible fact with a ghoul-like relish. She brought it forth immediately that public matters were spoken of. Breathe but the

name of Sir Colin Campbell, waft but a sigh towards yonder victims at Lucknow, and Flossie flourished her carpet-bag.

'Do you think he was a foreign spy?' she asked, when Vyvyan had enlivened a silent dinner-table by some gentle droppings from the last batch of Indian news.

'A foreign spy? Havelock? No, he's the son of a Sunderland shipbuilder.'

'I mean the poor thing in the carpet-bag,' explained Flossie. 'There must have been a motive, you know. His poor remains wouldn't have been stuck on an abutment of Waterloo Bridge unless *somebody* had wanted to get rid of him. I think he must have been a spy.'

'What a morbid interest you take in that horrid murder, supposing it really was a murder!' said Vyvyan.

'Supposing, indeed!' ejaculated Flossie; 'of course it was a murder—a diabolical murder. It quite aggravates me when people try to explain it into nothing. I know that very abutment on that very bridge,' she added, with an air of superiority.

'We had a murder once in our parts,' said Mark, as if it were something to be proud of; 'but it's a long time ago. The poor fellow who was murdered was a Camelot man, and he was going home from market after having sold some cattle, and he was set upon and murdered by two fellows whom he had been kind to. His brother was a lieutenant in the navy. His ship was coming home from Barbadoes at the time, and he dreamed that he saw his brother lying wounded and bloody on the Camelot road. The dream made him uneasy for a day or so, but he put aside the thought of it as foolishness; and when his ship came into Plymouth Sound the first boat that boarded her brought a half-penny broadsheet with the dying speech and confession of the murderers of poor Harry Denmark.'

Flossie was deeply interested in this brief summary; and henceforward, when Vyvyan and his brother showed any disposition to discuss the Mutiny, she overwhelmed them both with questions about that interesting murder on the Camelot road.

One day, when Barbara and her mother were alone together, the troubled heart found relief in a sudden burst of confidence.

'Mother,' she said, 'I know now why George gave me up.'

'What!' cried Mrs. Trevornock, with a scared look. 'Surely he has not written to you?'

'No, dear. But he has behaved like a hero, and people have been writing about him. He was most unjustly treated; his honour, and his honesty even, were impeached; and, stung by the injustice he suffered, hopeless of future prosperity, he wrote to release me. It was nobly meant; but, O mother, he ought to have known me better! And I wrote to him. I told him—'

She broke down at the thought of that useless letter. Mrs.

Trevornock was also weeping. Mother and daughter mingled their tears.

'But, my dearest, my beloved one,' sobbed the mother, 'think how good Providence has been to you, how merciful God has been to me. How could I have endured my life if you had been in India at this dreadful time? I must have died of the torture of suspense, the agony of waiting for news. And now you are so happily placed: mistress of this noble old house, one of the richest women in Cornwall, your own carriage and horses, your own ponies, every conceivable luxury—'

'Don't, don't, mother!' cried Barbara desperately; 'don't congratulate me; it is too bitter!'

On one of those autumnal days when white mist-wreaths were curling up from the marshy hollows on the moor and dark clouds were hanging about the tors, Vyvyan Penruth drove his dog-cart across the hills to the quarries. These quarries lay in a hollow of the cliff, close to the sea—a wild inaccessible spot as seen from the beach below, but approached easily enough by the narrow winding road that hugged the coast as far as King Arthur's castle yonder, and into unknown regions beyond.

Mark was sitting at his desk in his private office—a mere den of a room, with a single window looking straight into a slaty chaos. He was not labouring with any excessive industry; indeed at the moment of his brother's entrance he was sitting with his elbows on the table, chewing a stump of lead-pencil and staring moodily at empty space.

'Business no brighter?' asked the Squire curtly.

'Not one whit.'

'Well, I've been thinking over our last conversation, and I've made up my mind.'

'About what?' asked Mark, roused to sharp attention.

'I'll have the books examined by an accountant. Nothing like the educated brain for grasping a difficulty.'

'Do you suppose—' began Mark, starting to his feet.

'I cast no imputation upon your good faith, Mark; but for the last three years I have felt that things have been drifting into muddle. Muddle in business matters is a thing I detest. I'm no accountant myself—indeed, though I'm a pretty good farmer, I'm afraid I'm a bad man of business—and I begin to suspect that you, whom I once thought an oracle, are not much better. So I've written to a fellow I know in London to come down here, and go steadily through the quarry accounts for the last ten years. He was educated as an accountant, though he is now in a solicitor's office, and he's as sharp as a needle. I expect him at Place this evening; so you can just put the books into my trap, and I'll take them home with me.'

'The books!' faltered Mark, staring confusedly at his brother.

'Ay, man, the books. What else is there for an accountant to look over? You can bring as many vouchers, or anything else, as you please. I want the whole business put shipshape, so that I may know how little or how much I am getting out of the quarries. I tell you I want the books for the last ten years!' he repeated, aggravated by Mark's helpless air. 'Here, I'd better get them myself.'

The books were in an iron safe, let into the wall just behind Mark's chair. It happened that the key was in the safe, and the door ajar; for Mark had been poring over his ledger that afternoon.

Vyvyan flung open the safe-door, and brought out the contents of the safe—a dozen or so of vellum-bound account-books.

'If you've done your day's work you may as well drive home with me,' said Vyvyan, when Mark had locked the empty safe and put the key in his pocket.

'Yes, I'll come with you,' answered Mark.

CHAPTER XXI.

THE GENTLEMAN IN QUESTION.

THE aid which Vyvyan Penruth had called in, seemingly by some sudden whim, was that of Mr. Trevornock's articulated clerk, Mr. Maulford. Lewis Maulford had begun the serious business of life in an accountant's office, at fourteen years of age. He had shown so marked a capacity for business that at two-and-twenty he was junior partner in the flourishing young firm to which he had attached himself. It was a new firm, a house not deeply rooted into the very soil of the City, bound and interwoven with the very life of the commercial world by the traditions of ages, the repute of a dozen generations. It was a young house, and an adventurous house; and its name was generally to be seen associated with financial shipwrecks of a doubtful character. But the firm made money, and went its way rejoicing, the three partners vieing with each other in the smartness of their general turnout, from the white hat bought at Melton's the day before the Derby, to Mulliner's newest and lightest thing in dog-carts. Every day in life was a half-holiday for this lively young firm; they worked short hours and made plenty of money; till one day it occurred to a disputatious and suspicious creditor that the young firm were holding rather too tightly to the assets of a certain bankrupt estate. Then came investigation, a broad charge of embezzlement, a general sifting

of things, and closed shutters at the neat offices near Warnford-court. One of the senior partners sailed for New York; the other, whose domestic entanglements were serious, blew his brains out. Mr. Maulford took matters in a widely different spirit. He determined to live it down. With this view he went boldly about the City, representing himself as a dupe and a victim. Had he not invested his widowed mother's savings in the firm, and was not that poor lady now face to face with the work-house, unless he could get into some kind of berth that would enable him to maintain her? That widowed parent of Lewis Maulford's was his trump card. He always played her in an emergency.

He gave so much valuable information about the missing books of the exploded firm that he made himself useful and necessary; and with the progress of time the idea became general that Maulford was an honest man who had been more pigeon than crow. True that he had worn three-guinea hats and driven a smart dog-cart, and had enjoyed life at Epsom and Ascot; but he had done it all in innocence, not knowing that he was battenning upon the assets due to defrauded tradesmen. He was so young, pleaded his friends. He was old enough to know better, urged his enemies.

Such had been Lewis Maulford's position when he accepted a situation as clerk with Mr. Trevornock, on the condition that his employer should, after a year or two of faithful service, give him his articles. He had now been five years with Mr. Trevornock, and was qualified to begin business on his own account, but seemed in no hurry to do so. However small were his earnings at the office in Gray's Inn, where, according to Flossie, a client was rather the exception than the rule, they seemed to suffice for him and his widowed mother, a lady almost as invisible as Mrs. Harris.

'I expect a visitor at dinner to-day,' Mr. Penruth said to his wife, just before he set out for the quarries.

'Indeed, Vyvyan! Is it any one I know?' asked Barbara.

'Yes; you know something of him. It is Maulford, your father's clerk.'

'He here!'

'Yes. You look vexed. He doesn't come exactly as a guest; though, as there's no decent inn nearer than Rockport or Camelot, he may stop here for a few days. He is coming to do a little bit of business for me. I'm sorry you dislike him.'

'I do very much dislike him,' Barbara answered frankly, 'though I really have no reason for doing so. He has always been extremely civil to Flossie and me—rather obtrusively civil—and perhaps that is why she and I—'

'Regard him with unmitigated abhorrence,' said Flossie, who was present. 'Spiders, snakes, cockroaches, and Maulfords are my especial aversion.'

'Hard upon a man who has by your own admission done nothing to offend you,' remonstrated Vyvyan, looking down at his sister-in-law as if she were some curious foreign bird in an aviary, whose habits he had not yet begun to understand.

'He has done everything to offend us. He is sly, he is false, he is a sneak, he is a schemer, he is the image of Uriah Heep, and he has had the audacity to pity us, and to let us know it. However, I am rather glad he will see Barbara in a grand old house of her own, with men-servants and a carriage. He can't pretend to pity her now.'

'I hope not,' said Vyvyan, looking glum.

Seven o'clock came, and the dinner-bell, which rang in a cupola over the hall, and might almost have been heard on the top of Brownwilly. The St. Columb coach had dropped Mr. Maulford at the gates of Place, and he had walked modestly across the so-called park, carrying his carpet-bag. He had had just enough time to dress for dinner, and his black clothes and white tie put Vyvyan and his brother to shame in their coarse gray and hob-nailed shoes.

When Lewis Maulford went down to the drawing-room, sleek, smiling his blandest smile, he found her whom he had hoped to find there, alone. The room was half in shadow, half in the warm ruddy light of a wood fire, and Barbara was standing on the hearth, a solitary figure, her foot on the low fender, her eyes looking downward at the burning logs. She wore the black-velvet gown which Flossie had helped her to choose; rich old lace, her aunt Sophia's gift, at throat and wrists; and a black-enamel locket, heart-shaped, with a true lover's knot in diamonds, a jewel that her husband had bought her in Paris. She had held it one of her duties as a wife to dress herself becomingly when she sat at her husband's table. However low her spirits had sunk, however heavily the burden of existence had weighed upon her, she had never assumed a neglected air, never allowed herself to drift into carelessness of the outward shows and decencies of life.

Mr. Maulford fell back a pace or two with a look of surprise when his hostess turned and faced him in the warm light of the oak logs. She had changed much since he had last seen her. The girl had blossomed into the woman. The grave dignity of her manner took him by surprise. He had expected to find a fretful disappointed girl, weary of a monotonous and empty life, and with weariness and disappointment stamped upon her faded beauty. He saw a proud woman, grave with the gravity of one whose whole life had been sobered by a deep sorrow, but not

fretful, not discontented. A grand soul shone out of those lovely eyes, a soul that had grown strong in suffering.

She acknowledged his entrance with a bow which was politely distant.

'I expected to find Mr. Penruth here,' he said, with a less comfortable sense of his own superiority to humanity in general than he was wont to feel.

'He is sometimes a little late for dinner when he has been driving far. I don't suppose he will keep us long.'

Here Flossie came rustling in, dressed in a black silk gown all over crimped flounces, and a sticking-out petticoat, the precursor of crinoline. She acknowledged Mr. Maulford's greeting with a bend that would have been haughty in a Spanish Infanta, which small insolence Mr. Maulford immediately jotted down in the debtor and creditor account that he kept against his acquaintance.

Flossie's appearance was in some way a relief. It made conversation easier with Barbara, who was still standing alone by the fireside.

'Your father wished to be affectionately remembered to you, Mrs. Penruth,' said Maulford.

'And I've no doubt he wished to be affectionately forgotten by me,' remarked Flossie.

'My father is very well, I hope?' said Barbara, with forced politeness.

'He is enjoying excellent health.'

Here entered Mrs. Trevornock in a smart cap, glowing with pride at the idea that her husband's attired clerk, who doubtless knew of her small anxieties in the past, should behold her daughter mistress of this historical mansion.

While she was greeting Mr. Maulford, with more courtesy than he had received from her daughters, Vyvyan and his brother appeared in their gray coats and thick boots, having washed their hands hurriedly in the down-stairs den where the Squire kept books, guns, sticks, whips, and cattle medicines.

'How do you do, Maulford? Hope you had a pleasant journey down?'

'I had a long one,' said Maulford, smiling.

'Yes, it's a longish way. Mr. Maulford, my brother Mark. I want you two to be friendly and useful to each other;' and Mr. Penruth offered his arm to his mother-in-law, and walked off to the dining-room, leaving the others to follow as they pleased.

Maulford immediately impounded Mrs. Penruth, and Mark gave his arm to Flossie, his usual custom.

'Is it cold on the moor?' she asked, looking at him as they crossed the lamplit hall. 'You're not looking well.'

'Cold!' he echoed discontentedly. 'It's biting; a damp creepy cold that freezes your marrow.'

'You look as if yours was frozen,' said Flossie.

Their dinner usually was a somewhat silent meal, save for abrupt gushes of talk from Flossie or Mrs. Trevornock; but Mr. Maulford seemed as bent upon making conversation as if he had been a professed wit invited for that end.

He talked of Indian affairs—men could talk and think of hardly anything else in London, he said.

'And that dreadful carpet-bag murder,' interjected Flossie. 'Everybody was talking of that when we left home.'

'Then Camberwell must be vastly behind the times. That was a nine days' wonder which I thought was worn threadbare.'

'Such a mysterious thing,' urged Flossie. 'Nothing so dreadful has happened since the time of Lucretia Borgia, when the nobility were always dropping each other into canals, and tying each other in sacks; and one couldn't eat one's dinner in peace because of a horrid Council of Ten waiting round the corner to stab one; or a Vehmgericht sitting in judgment in a dark cellar, ready to hand one over to a masked executioner—'

Here the speaker faltered for want of breath, and Mr. Maulford took up the thread of his discourse about the Mutiny. He talked of Havelock and Colin Campbell, of Lucknow and Cawnpore, of the dread uncertainty which still surrounded all things. And then he harked back to the storming of Delhi, and the men who had taken part in the siege. He dwelt on the long period of waiting; a handful of English officers, at the head of a small army chiefly composed of Sikhs and Afghans, who might at any moment revolt, encamped in a pestilential spot in the hottest season of the year, and yet, as by a miracle, preserved alike from pestilence and insurrection. He talked of Wilson and Baird Smith, of Brigadier-General Nicholson's untimely fate, of the blowing up of the Cashmere gate in broad daylight in the teeth of the foe, and the fourteen days' hard fighting, foot to foot and hand to hand, before the city was won.

Barbara listened, pale, breathless, her eyes fixed on the speaker, waiting for the name which instinct told her he meant presently to pronounce.

'He knows he is torturing me,' she told herself, 'and he is doing it with deliberate malice.'

'I'm glad they spared the old king's life,' said Mr. Maulford. 'He was little more than a tool, at worst. That murder of the princes was a brutal thing.'

'Princes? Do you mean the young princes in the Tower?' asked Flossie, plunging eagerly into the conversation, as she had done a few minutes before with her carpet-bag.

Dinner was finished, and the servants had left the room. Old

fashioned diamond-cut decanters were circulating old-fashioned port and sherry. Flossie was peeling a wintry pear, and Mark was cracking walnuts with an air of gloomy abstraction. Vyvyan sat back in his chair, and sipped his port, languidly interested in the Mutiny.

'I mean the murder of the king's son, nephew, and grandson by Major Leland,' said Mr. Maulford. 'There is nothing baser or more treacherous recorded in Kings or Chronicles, and that's going a long way.'

'Murder!' cried Barbara, her eyes flaming, her cheeks deadly pale; 'who has ever dared to call it murder! It was a sublime act of justice; it was brave, noble, done before the face of the enemy; he one of a handful of men among an armed rabble of thousands! Do you forget how he, with his lieutenant and four troopers, rode into the garden where there were three thousand armed men, and made them lay down their arms? How he held a crowd of six thousand at bay while he shot those rebels, and told the people before he did it what they had done and why they were to die? How dare you call it murder! No more righteous act was ever done. You pretend to know all about the siege of Delhi, and yet are so ignorant as to misunderstand Major Leland's conduct!'

'Upon my word—' faltered Mr. Maulford.

'Do you forget General Wilson's address to his army before the siege? For the rebels there was to be no quarter. Women were to be spared, and children; but there was to be no mercy for the murderers of women and children. And if there was to be no mercy for them, the rank and file of rebellion, were these princes, their leaders and captains, to be spared?'

'They were prisoners; they had surrendered.'

'Unconditionally. He would accept no other surrender. They knew what they had to expect. Had he faltered, he and his men would have been massacred before the gate, cut down by the mob, and his prisoners rescued. He knew that. It was his duty to take them alive or dead. He did his duty, nobly, bravely. It was not in his nature to be cruel.'

'Good God!' ejaculated Mr. Maulford suddenly, 'I forgot you knew him. I beg your pardon, Mrs. Penruth. Upon my honour the name had slipped my memory, and in discussing public affairs—'

Vyvyan turned upon him brusquely. He had been watching his wife, and listening to her indignant protest, surprised at her agitation.

'Why do you apologise to my wife?' he asked. 'O, I see; this Major Leland is a friend of hers.'

'They are Somersetshire people,' exclaimed the intrepid Flossie, as if that accounted for everything; 'his mother was a

clergyman—I mean his father was a widow who married a cler—

‘I understand,’ said Vyvyan, heedless of the eager Flossie, looking slowly from his wife to Maulford and back again. ‘Leland! I knew you had an Anglo-Indian acquaintance in past years, but I never heard the name before. And so the gentleman is a hero?’

‘He is a noble creature,’ exclaimed Mrs. Trevornock, her eyes filling with remorseful tears, ‘and I am proud of having known him. He was very kind to us once—when he board—when we—saw a good deal of him.’

‘Salmon, strawberries, gloves, grouse, ribbons, partridges, theatres, lobsters,’ repeated Flossie inwardly.

‘Humph!’ muttered Vyvyan, massacring filberts with a savage strength of hand, and looking wrathfully at his wife. ‘I had no idea the gentleman in question was such a distinguished personage.’

CHAPTER XXII.

‘HEXEREI UND SCHELMEREI.’

MR. MAULFORD began his examination of Mark’s books, with a view to the preparation of a balance-sheet, which should show Vyvyan, in a succinct and comprehensive manner, the state of affairs at the quarries: what he had been making in the past, and how it was that the gains of the past had dwindled to the losses of the present.

‘I am not a man to carry on a loss,’ Mr. Penruth told his brother at the breakfast-table, on the morning after the accountant’s arrival. ‘If the quarries cease to pay me, I shall shut them up at a day’s notice. I am not going on digging slate, which nobody wants to use, for the sake of employing labour.’

Mark looked harassed and uneasy, as he naturally might, seeing that his occupation, with the three hundred a year he earned by it, was in jeopardy.

Before Lewis Maulford retired to the study, where his work was to be begun, he took an opportunity of speaking to Barbara, in the embrasure of a window, out of earshot of the rest.

‘I am so sorry for my stupidity at dinner yesterday,’ he said humbly. ‘I give you my honour that I had forgotten—’

‘You tell me so,’ she answered, looking at him with deliberate scorn, ‘and I am obliged to believe you. There is no occasion to apologise—unless it were for having slandered Major Leland. His name is not tabooed here.’

‘But I so deeply regret having wounded you—’ he protested.

'It is not in your power to do that,' she answered proudly. 'Pray say no more about it.'

And from this time forward she never addressed him by word or look, save when some direct interrogation on his side forced her to speak to him.

'Not in my power to wound you, sweet one!' he said to himself more than once that day, as he bent over Mark's ledgers. 'Take care that it is not in my power to stab you to the heart's core. That was only a playful thrust yesterday. Wait and see. Your South American savage, the free child of the forest, has arrows so light that his breath can blow them through a reed, but their points are steeped in a poison which makes the slightest scratch deadly. Look out for my poisoned arrows, my queen.'

The investigation of the books and preparation of the balance-sheet proved a longer task than Mr. Penruth had supposed. On the day after his arrival at Place, Lewis Maulford transferred himself to homelier quarters at the King's Arms, Camelot; but the ledgers and other documents were left in Vyvyan's study, and it was there the accountant's work was done.

Whatever dislike Mark might in the first instance have felt to having his books audited by a stranger, he had evidently reconciled his mind to the fact; for he treated Mr. Maulford with unusual courtesy and friendliness, hung about him in an almost affectionate manner, played billiards with him in the stuffy billiard-room of the inn, and introduced him to the choice spirits of Camelot society, who, at Mark's instigation, received the foreigner with open arms.

Mark's friendliness went even further than this; for when Lewis Maulford had been quartered at the King's Arms for a little less than a week, Mark proposed a cigar in the open air after a closely-won game at billiards, in which native talent had succumbed to the alien's more finished play; and, after smoking a couple of cigars under the bright wintry moon, Mark brought his companion to a standstill before the white gate of the cottage on the St. Columb road.

'Come in and rest a bit,' he said; 'it's dismal out of doors.'

'Friend of yours live here?' inquired Mr. Maulford innocently.

His host at the King's Arms had told him all that Camelot could tell of the lady in the cottage, and had given him a good many of Camelot's speculations upon the subject.

'Yes, I'm pretty much at home here,' answered Mark, with a laugh. 'If the lady of the house is in an amiable mood, I'll give you a better glass of Hollands than you could get at old Lanherne's.'

'If I' echoed Maulford. 'It will be our fault if the lady isn't amiable.'

'Humph!' muttered Mark. 'You think you can put a woman in a good temper, whether or no? You're a bachelor.'

'Aren't you one?'

'Well, yes, of course I'm a bachelor. It wouldn't do for my brother to suppose I was anything else. But it isn't easy for a man to go through life without some kind of entanglement. I've not kept myself as free from difficulty of that sort as I might have done if I'd been wise. Yet you can hardly blame me, when you see a fellow of Vyvyan's age go and marry a penniless girl for the sake of her pretty face.'

'And a girl who was over head and ears in love with another man,' retorted Maulford. 'That's the worst part of the business.'

'O, come now; she has been married two years, and she has behaved uncommonly well.'

'I should like to know how a woman could behave ill in the middle of a Cornish moor, unless she eloped with her butler,' retorted Maulford, as Mark opened the cottage-door.

The parlour where Mark had tossed about the sofa-pillows in utter dejection on the night following his brother's home-coming looked bright and cheery on this winter evening. A good fire burned in the bright little grate, fender and fire-irons shone with much polishing. There was a tea-tray on the table with the best tea-things, if Mr. Maulford could only have known it and fully appreciated the honour done him; and on the mahogany chiffonier the customary ornaments of Bohemian glass and Derbyshire spa had been removed to make room for a second tray with a cut-glass spirit-decanter, a sugar-basin, and tumblers. A noisy copper kettle with an opal-glass handle spluttered gaily on a brass trivet; a dish of muffins basked in the fire-glow; and beside the fire sat a buxom little woman with keen black eyes, rosy cheeks, a resolute mouth and chin, and the glossiest hair Mr. Maulford had ever seen. She wore a bright blue-silk gown, which fitted her well-rounded figure to perfection, and her collar was fastened with Mark's photograph mounted in a heavy gold brooch.

'Mr. Maulford, Mrs. Peters.'

Lewis Maulford took in the situation at a glance. Mark's books had already given him a good deal of information. Mark's character was easier to read than a book. Mr. Maulford understood that he had been invited here in order that the lady in blue, who was shrewder than Mark, might sift him, and possibly win him over to Mark's interests. He could see that the blue lady was clever and self-assured, her self-assurance being as six to one in proportion to her cleverness.

'I thought you'd like a cup of tea after being out in the cold,' Mrs. Peters said graciously, as she peeped into the teapot, with her glossy head on one side.

'How smart you are!' exclaimed Mark, who had no more tact than a hippopotamus.

'You said you might drop in with a friend,' the lady answered modestly, 'and I didn't want to be caught a figure.'

'You're never a figure,' muttered Mark; 'catch you at it!'

'Never anything but a very pretty figure, I am sure,' said Mr. Maulford gallantly.

'Sugar and cream?' murmured Mrs. Peters, bridling.

Mr. Maulford took sugar and cream. He declared himself passionately addicted to tea, and at once put Mark, who detested tea, at a disadvantage. He even ate muffins, and behaved altogether as a man accustomed to polite tea-parties. The conversation began with stiffness, but soon waxed easy. After Camelot and its surroundings had been discussed, in guide-book phraseology, the talk grew more personal.

'I suppose you've seen Mr. Penruth's wife since you've come among us,' said the little woman; and there was a sparkle in her hard black eyes which informed Mr. Maulford that of all people who on earth do dwell Mrs. Penruth was the most hateful to Mrs. Peters.

'O, yes, I've seen her. She is an old acquaintance of mine.'

'So Mark told me. And you knew her first lover?'

'Yes; I knew him too. I saw their parting, poor things, when he went on board the P. and O. steamer. It was a touching scene.'

And then Mr. Maulford told the story of his meeting with Barbara at Southampton, dwelling upon the fact of her presence there with some significance, as if it implied more than he cared to say.

'Wasn't it rather a strange thing for a prudent young woman to do?' asked Mrs. Peters.

'Rather; but the Trevornock girls have been oddly brought up. The mother is what you would call a character.'

'Do you mean that she wears her bonnet tilted over her forehead, and her petticoats up to her ankles?' inquired Mrs. Peters.

'No, no. Her bonnets are right enough, and nobody ever saw her ankles. But she has peculiar ideas—has brought up her daughters in a free-and-easy way, as if they had been young men.'

'Then I'm sorry for Mr. Penruth,' said Mrs. Peters solemnly. 'I never have thought, from first to last, that any good would come of such a marriage; but after what you tell me—'

Here she shook her head vehemently, and lapsed into silence, as if her presentiment of evil to come were too terrible to be expressed. She opened the parlour-door and rang a sharp little hand-bell; whereat a small apple-cheeked maiden appeared, who carried off the tea-things, and then reappeared and set the de-

canters and glasses on the table, swept up the hearth, replenished the copper kettle out of a homelier iron vessel, and generally made things comfortable.

When this damsel had retired Mrs. Peters resumed the discussion of those family matters which could not be spoken of before a servant.

'I am very sorry for Mr. Penruth,' she said, 'but I am sorrier still for Mark. It comes hard upon him, poor fellow.'

Mr. Maulford, who followed her every thought, pretended not to understand the drift of this speech.

'In what way?' he asked innocently.

'In every way. Hasn't he been led to think himself his brother's heir for the last fifteen years? for it's as long ago that Vyvyan declared he should never marry; and, indeed, his ways were the ways of a confirmed bachelor. And after looking forward to the estate for himself, or at any rate for his children—'

Here Mark scowled and shook his head at the fair speaker.

'It's no use frowning at me, Mark. There's no treason in saying that you counted on the estate for yourself, and those that were to come after you—there's no treason in saying you might have children; for you've as good a right to be the father of a family as your elder brother has, and it's only your own poor spirit that has kept you down. And I say, and I will say, that it's hard upon you to lose everything, after looking forward to it so long.'

'Who says he has lost everything?' asked Mr. Maulford.

'Hasn't his brother married?'

'True, but at present there seems no likelihood of a family.'

'Don't tell me!' exclaimed Mrs. Peters contemptuously; 'family or no family, the estate is lost to Mark.'

'I beg your pardon. I happen, perhaps, to be able to make a better estimate of Mr. Mark's chances than he can himself; for I know more of Mr. Penruth's affairs. If the Squire should have no son to inherit his estate and maintain the good old name in the land where he and his forbears were born, you may depend he'll not leave it away from his brother; unless, indeed, he should have some special ground of quarrel with that brother, or some reason for doubting his honour and honesty, which of course is out of the question.'

Maulford emphasised these last words with a searching look at Mark, who sat pale and downcast in his corner by the fire, stirring his grog, and not seeming to derive much comfort from that beverage.

'O, never fear, she'll get round him,' said Mrs. Peters, with a sarcastic laugh. 'She married him for his fortune, and she'll never give him any peace till she makes sure of it all.'

'I grant that it might be so, if she were a bright, clever, capa-

ble woman, like some people I could name,' replied the accountant, contemplating Mrs. Peters with a bold admiring smile; 'but she is not. Her mind is wrapped up in the past, and the lover she parted with at Southampton. Any affection she can spare from him she lavishes on her mother. That leaves cold comfort for Mr. Penruth. Do you suppose he's satisfied or happy in his marriage? When he was most ardent, in the very beginning of things, he refused to make a will in his wife's favour. Tom Trevornock pushed him hard enough, as hard as he could venture, so as not to lose him. "No," said Penruth; "I shall make no new will yet awhile." "Your marriage cancels the old one," says Trevornock. "Never mind that. If I have a son, he'll inherit the land; and if I have no children, things may stand as they are. I've done enough for your daughter in all conscience." Trevornock could hardly gainsay him, you see, for he had settled an estate worth eighteen thousand pounds on the young lady.'

'The Hallworthy estate,' growled Mark. 'It cost my great-grandfather fifteen thousand. She has only a life interest in it, I suppose?'

'No; it is settled on her, and her children after her. Your brother has power of appointment, and can do what he likes with the reversion, in the event of there being no children. So you see, my dear madam,' pursued Mr. Maulford cheerily, 'your friend Mark is by no means in such bad case as you have supposed. Unless he should by some misadventure, or some fault, prove himself unworthy to be trusted with the estate, unworthy to bear the good old name, he is safe to inherit the land.'

'Provided Mrs. Penruth has no children,' said Mrs. Peters. 'She has been married only two years and a half. It's early days to count upon her having no family.'

'True,' sighed Mr. Maulford, who affected to be bound up in the fortunes of his new friends.

'If Mr. Penruth were to die suddenly, now,' speculated Mrs. Peters. A gleam as of hope lit up Mark's anxious face, flashed from his heavy eyes, and was gone, leaving a dull blank. 'If he were to drop down in a fit—of course I'm not wishing such a thing, but it would be a godsend to Mark. But men of his build seldom go off like that.'

It was a curious suggestion, and Mr. Maulford looked curiously at the speaker.

'I shrewdly suspect you're Mark's wedded wife, my lady,' he said to himself, 'and I'm uncommonly glad you're not mine.'

CHAPTER XXIII.

'I SHALL HAVE TO DOCTOR MY BALANCE-SHEET.'

AFTER that first evening Mr. Maulford's visits at the cottage in St. Columb road were so frequent that it may be said he spent all his leisure there, and used the King's Arms only as a shelter for the night.

Mrs. Peters provided snug little dinners for Mark and his new friend, and there was a perennial flow of spirits-and-water of an evening. The veil with which Mark concealed the exact nature of his domestic arrangements from Mr. Maulford was of the most diaphanous tissue—a mere summer-evening vapour.

'If I didn't think you were a fellow to be trusted, I should never have asked you in yonder,' said Mark one afternoon, with a jerk of his head towards the homely stone cottage, where the last crysanthemums were fading amidst the chill haze of a November twilight.

'You have been wise to trust me,' answered the other, slowly pulling at his cigar with a grave business-like countenance. 'If you were anything but candid and straightforward—to me—I couldn't see my way to help you ; and, by Jove, you want a good deal of help!'

'How do you mean?' faltered Mark.

He had let his cigar go out, and was struggling feebly with a fusee, the image of helplessness, his large sunburnt hand tremulous with agitation.

'You know how I mean. Haven't I to work out a balance-sheet which won't compromise you—if I can? And do you suppose I find it easy to do it?'

'The builders have been so backward in their settlements of late—' began Mark.

'Backward, indeed! It seems to me that nobody has paid you anything for the last two years. You must have a sheaf of dishonoured acceptances in your safe : unless you've melted the bills, and—'

'Made use of the money?' faltered Mark. 'I have ; there's no good in denying it—to you. I'm in a hole, and you must get me out of it. You're a splendid man of business ; you've a clear brain, which I haven't ; you can square things with my brother. You say I'm pretty safe to come into the estate by and by. If ever I do, I'll pay you a hundredfold for any service you can do me now.'

'But how can I, as an honest man, pretend not to see facts that are staring me in the face? If I doctor my balance-sheet as your books have been doctored—or in a very different style, rather ; for I should be sorry to make such a clumsy job of any-

thing I took in hand—how can I look in your brother's face? how can I reconcile my conscience to—'

'Easily. It will be a Christian act to get a poor beggar out of a scrape. Doesn't the Gospel always lean kindly to sinners? It isn't the rich man or the Pharisee that you are called upon to comfort or help, but the poor kicked-about despised creatures—your publicans and Magdalens. Stand by me, Maulford, there's a good fellow,' pleaded Mark. 'I shouldn't have taken to you as I have if I hadn't felt from the first that you were a friend. Stand by me, and I'll stand by you. It isn't only what I can do in the future, but if you want a fifty-pound note in the present, why, you can have it. I—I've got an unmelted acceptance in the safe, that's as good as a Bank of England note. All you've got to do is to make your balance-sheet right. What does it matter to my brother if he's a thousand or two richer or poorer at the end of the year? His income at its lowest is more than he can spend. He's always making some kind of investment.'

'But if the balance-sheet shows that the quarries have been a dead loss for the last two years, he'll shut up shop.'

'No, he won't. That's a mere *brutum fulmen*. He'll grumble and growl; but we must talk about a revival in the building trade; and I'll be more careful in future. Get me out of this scrape, Maulford, and, as I am a man, I'll never tumble into another.'

Maulford gave him a curiously contemptuous look under cover of the November dusk.

'If you *were* a man, I might believe you,' thought the accountant; 'but there's very little true manhood about your limp self-indulgent nature, my friend.'

'What have you done with all this money?' he asked presently. 'Our friend yonder seems a managing little body; *she* would hardly ruin a man.'

'No, no, Molly is careful enough; but a house and family cost money, don't you know; and, in short, the whole thing has been a drag upon me. And I've bought a horse now and then, and a dog or two; and I've been deucedly unlucky in horseflesh, though I think I know a good thing when I see it as well as any man in Cornwall.'

'A little betting too, I suppose?' suggested Maulford.

'Only a fiver or so on a race occasionally with Nichols or Diddcott.'

'I see. And billiards?'

'Well, of course a man can't play billiards all the year with the same set of fellows without betting a little.'

'Just to give an interest in the game; I suppose not. A man who lives all the year round in such a place as Camelot ought to

be forgiven a good deal,' said Maulford indulgently. 'He ought to be forgiven if he cuts his throat at the end of the first twelve-month,' he added inwardly.

What a weak creature it was, this younger brother of the rugged unyielding Vyvyan!—another temperament altogether. Soap-stone as compared with granite. The same soil will produce both.

Such a man was destined by his very nature to become the tool of unscrupulous astuteness, in the person of Lewis Maulford.

The ex-accountant made a mental balance-sheet for his own guidance. All that he had said of Vyvyan's refusal to make a will in his wife's favour was strictly true. As things now stood, the elder brother dying without a will, Mark must inherit the land. But how long might the situation remain thus favourable to Mark's interests? A son might be born, to oust the brother from all chance of succession. Or the husband might be influenced to leave the land to his wife. This was hardly likely, Mr. Maulford thought, now that he had let in a little light upon the husband's mind as to that Indian lover of the lady's. Mr. Maulford might find it necessary, or advantageous, to let in more light by and by.

From Vyvyan there was no large reward to be gained—merely a hireling's wages for a hireling's work; from Vyvyan's wife, nothing. But from this malleable Mark how much profit a clever man might extort, would Fate but transform this penniless sinner into a wealthy landowner! A man's gratitude is but a poor thing to count upon; and ready as Mark was with his promises now that he was in a scrape, he might be equally ready to forget them when he was out of it. There is no Lethe more efficacious than the fountain in which we drown the sense of obligation. But Mr. Maulford felt that if he helped Mark now, he would have a much surer hold upon him in the future than that airy virtue gratitude. The man would be afraid of him.

'I shall make him my slave,' he said to himself.

'I'll do my best to get you through your difficulties,' he told Mark presently, 'if it were only for the sake of that nice little lady yonder, who ought not to suffer for your follies. It's no easy job, I can tell you, and will tax my powers of management to the uttermost. You have doctored your books, and I shall have to doctor my balance-sheet.'

Mark grasped his hand feverishly.

'God bless you!' he exclaimed; 'you're a true Christian. You don't go on the other side of the way, and leave the wounded traveller; and you don't kick him while he's down.'

Mr. Maulford smiled to himself in the dusk.

'O, you compare yourself to the wounded traveller, do you? I should have suggested a greater likeness to the other party.'

'The Samaritan?' asked Mark.

'No, the thieves.'

'Don't be hard upon me,' pleaded Mark; 'I'm in your power.'

'You must turn over a new leaf, you know,' said Maulford. 'You'll have to show a very different state of things when next I come to inspect the books. I couldn't manage this matter for you a second time.'

'I know it, my dear fellow. Turn over a new leaf! By Jove, I shall begin a new book. I'll never buy another horse. I'll sell those I have. I'll cut the old set at the King's Arms. I'll get some other crib for Molly—out of the way of all my old connections—and send the young barbarians to school.'

'That would be a step in the right direction—if Mrs. Peters liked it.'

'She wouldn't like it, perhaps,' said Mark gloomily; 'but she'd have to put up with it. I've lived in fear and trembling long enough. I've had no more peace of mind in my home, if you can call that cottage yonder my home, than if I were living in a powder-magazine. The explosion might come any day.'

'Do you think your brother would take it so badly, if he knew all?'

'He'd leave me a beggar. He'd never forgive me—first, for doing what I have done yonder; next, for deceiving him. There's my sister too, as proud as Lucifer. She'd egg him on.'

'His own marriage is not a particularly brilliant one.'

'He has married a lady. Trevornock is a good old name. Tom Trevornock is the only scamp in that family.'

'Well, you had better give all your attention to making things as straight as you can at the quarries, and trust to Providence for the rest.'

'Providence!' growled Mark. 'Providence has done precious little for me. Providence gave my elder brother one of the finest estates in Cornwall, and gave my sister her mother's fortune, while I was left out in the cold.'

'Come, now, Providence did you a good turn in sending me your way. If a churlish pragmatist fellow had been called in to examine those books, where would you have been?'

'I should have been on my way to America, most likely,' answered Mark moodily, as if doubtful whether that transitional state might not have been preferable to his present situation.

'Leaving that poor little woman and her three boys to shift for themselves?'

'She wouldn't shift long. She'd go to my brother, and tell him the whole story.'

'And what would he do?'

'Send her to the workhouse. You don't know how hard he is.'

'He was soft enough about Miss Trevornock,' said Maulford.

'Yes, where his own fancy was caught. Every man's character has its weak side, I suppose.'

CHAPTER XXIV.

AUNT JOOLY.

THANKS to Lewis Maulford's skilful manipulation of books and other documents, Mark came through the furnace comparatively unscathed. Maulford, who was too good a diplomatist to prove too much, admitted to Vyvyan that his brother had been somewhat lax in his management of things of late years; that he had given long credits somewhat recklessly; that he had trusted builders of insufficient capital; and that he would have to open his eyes a little wider if he wished to be thought a good man of business. But he contrived to balance this blame by judicious praise. He harped upon Mark's conscientiousness, his determination to make the quarry a source of large profit in the future, and so to redeem the errors of the past.

'He has been hard hit, poor fellow, through his kindness of heart,' said Maulford.

'You mean that I've been hard hit. He loses nothing when builders go bankrupt.'

'He feels it more than you do.'

'I don't think he can. I can spend money, or give money, without a thought; but if you rob me you put a knife into me, and the wound rankles. Well, Mark must show himself a better manager within the next twelve months, and you must show me a better balance-sheet next November, or I shall shut up the quarries.'

'I have no doubt there will be an improvement. Mark has burnt his fingers.'

'You mean that he has burnt *my* fingers. He loses nothing. He'd think himself hardly used if I were to stop his salary, though he has free quarters in my house. But I'm afraid he has claims upon his purse that are as discreditable as they are foolish—some low connection at Camelot. I have heard as much.'

'Better than to marry a horse-rider, or a—a barmaid,—as some of your country squires have done.'

'A barmaid!' cried Vyvyan, aghast. 'A Penruth married to a barmaid! Do you know that we are one of the oldest families in Cornwa^{ll}? Do you suppose because I wear home-

spun and clump-soles that I have no pride of race? I would never forgive my brother if he degraded me. Let him degrade himself, let him be the black sheep of the family, and wallow in the gutter if he chooses, but let him bring no low-born wife, no half-bred brats to Place. One scamp in a family is like a dead branch on a fine old tree, lopped and forgotten; but a base graft, a low marriage,—that is history. I could never forgive that.'

These remarks were repeated at the cottage within a few hours of their utterance.

'Ah,' said Mrs. Peters, 'it's all very well for him to bluster; but if Mark were not such a coward I'd have made things right long ago. I never saw the man yet that I couldn't twist round my fingers if I tried.'

Yet despite this assertion of power Mrs. Peters brooded darkly on that speech of Vyvyan's, and contemplated her triplet of chubby boys with a moody look as the three young faces clustered round her in the evening firelight. They were fine, healthy, broad-shouldered boys, from the four-year-old baby to the youngster rising thirteen, and Mrs. Peters felt that Fate was using them hardly.

'I suppose if Mark were to brazen things out and tell the truth we should be beggars for the rest of our lives,' she said to herself. 'Yet it's hard to live under a cloud. If the Squire were to fall down in a fit, now, my sons would be in their right places up yonder. How Camelot folks would stare! And those that have slighted me would be sorry, perhaps!'

Mr. Maulford, having done his work, took his reward and departed. Before leaving Cornwall he made a point of seeing Barbara and her mother and sister one morning, in order, as he said, to inquire if he could carry any message to Mr. Trevornock, or perform any commission for either of the three ladies.

'If you could call in South-lane two or three times a day, to see if the house is on fire, you would be doing mother a favour,' said Flossie; 'for she is haunted by the most absurd fears about it, although every stick of our furniture is insured in the Pelican, or the Vulture, or some equally ridiculous bird.'

'I could never replace the things I have had all my life,' sighed Mrs. Trevornock.

'I should hope not, indeed. You would get nice new things instead. I'm sure a fire would be regeneration: and I should feel grateful to Amelia if she were to do any one of the idiotic acts you are always picturing to yourself.'

'No message for Mr. Trevornock?' asked the clerk.

'N-n-othing; except that we shall be returning to Camberwell in a fortnight,' faltered Mrs. Trevornock.

'He will be glad to know your movements.'

'He might, if we were to move to some other planet,' retorted Flossie. 'I don't think anything less than that would interest him.'

'Indeed, you misunderstand him,' said Mr. Maulford.

'If I do I must be preternaturally obtuse, for he has spoken very plainly.'

'You don't know how fond and proud he is of you.'

'No, I do not.'

Barbara sat by the fire reading throughout Mr. Maulford's visit. She would acknowledge him as neither friend nor guest. She spoke only when he compelled her to speak, and even then she answered him without looking up from her book.

'If I had been a bootmaker she could not have been ruder,' he told himself, as he left the house. 'Yet I need hardly trouble myself to be revenged. She has enemies enough without me.'

Mrs. Trevornock and Flossie stayed till after Christmas. It was happiness to Barbara to have them with her at that old familiar time; and it was pleasant to Flossie, who took upon her hands the task of Christmas decoration, to find herself hanging up holly in ancestral halls, and giving orders to half a dozen servants, all eager to do her bidding, for the servants at Place liked this lively young lady. True that she languished for a glimpse of the Walworth-road shops in all their Christmas bravery; the Repository, where the newest things in jewelry and candlestick ornaments always came out at Christmas; the drapers' windows ablaze with feathers and flowers and ribbons and evening gloves. But the novelty of country-house life, even in so dull a house as Place, was agreeable to her. Mark was gayer, too, after Mr. Maulford's departure. He escorted Flossie and his sister-in-law to see the hounds throw off at a windy spot among the wild hills, where they were almost frozen in their pony-carriage before the business of the day began. Flossie longed to follow the hounds, and gave Mark several hints to that effect, but to these he was impervious. He would have liked well enough to have such a pleasant companion for a long day's scamper over hill and valley, heather and bog; but in a region where everybody knew everybody else's business such indulgence would have been fatal. The little woman at Camelot would have heard of it, and those occasional glimpses of domesticity which Mark allowed himself would have been clouded over with strife.

While Mark was riding to hounds, companionless save for such company as the field afforded, and was doing his utmost to make his horses unsaleable before the time came which he had fixed in his own mind for selling them, the little woman at Camelot was contemplating life from a much graver standpoint. Mark, having scrambled through his financial difficulties—very

much as he and Pepper scrambled through a gap in a hedge, a good deal mauled and scratched by hawthorn and bramble, and splashed to the eyes with mud and duckweed—was beginning to take life in his old easy way. He was not going to get into a muddle again, he told himself. He would buy no more horses; he would sell those he had when the hunting season was over. They would sell all the better as seasoned hunters. He would give up billiards, and would cease to interest himself in the turf. He would read the sporting-papers no more; for there was temptation in the very names of the favourites, in the very mention of a coming race.

‘I will be as ignorant as the lowest hind in the county,’ he said to himself. But when his companions in the hunting-field, waiting at some quiet corner for the hounds, began to talk of the turf, Mark pricked up his ears and had his say.

Mrs. Peters was full of thought in these winter days. Her retired life in the cottage on the lonely country road gave her ample leisure for meditation. She thought as she polished her chairs and tables, and removed infinitesimal grains of dust from shining surfaces that were perpetually being dusted, and smoothed and folded her draperies, and arranged and rearranged her few gimcracks. Mrs. Peters was not a woman of wide resources. For books, save as ornaments on a chiffonier, she cared not a jot. She was a creature of action, energy, vigour. She would have liked to live in a crowd; and Fate had doomed her to domestic solitude, varied by the company of one dull man. Mr. Maulford’s society had been an enlivening influence while it lasted. She regretted him now that he was gone.

‘With such a man as that for a husband a woman might be sure of getting on in life,’ she reasoned; ‘but Mark is no better than a log. One might as well be a poor beast on a common, hobbled to one bit of green.’

Among those humble acquaintance with whom Mrs. Peters felt more at her ease than with the leading burghers of Camelot was an old woman who lived in a narrow lane off the High-street—a steep little break-neck lane, cottages on one side and pigsties on the other, leading up to nowhere, or to chaotic land that was neither field nor open country. This ancient female was widely known in Camelot under the friendly name of Aunt Jooly. It was supposed that in the remoteness of former generations she had been christened Julia, and that she had once possessed a surname; but these were things of the past. Within the memory of the living she had been always ‘Jooly,’ and generally ‘Aunt.’ Whether she had begun by having actual nephews and nieces before she became a titular aunt to everybody in the parish, no one ever paused to inquire. People who went away from Camelot for half a century or so. and came back to die

there when the outside world had grown tired of them, asked tenderly if Aunt Jooly were yet alive. Not because they cared for her, but because she was a landmark.

Aunt Jooly was, or asserted herself to be, of a fabulous age. If an event in history was mentioned in her presence she generally claimed to have been an eye-witness. The little children believed that she had been at Plymouth when the first alarm of the Spanish ships rang through the western land. She was accredited, perhaps in virtue of her years, with ineffable wisdom. She was a skilful herbalist, and, within closed doors, had been known to charm sore eyes, and cure rickets, rheumatism, and quinsy in an altogether supernatural manner. She was one of the last of those witches who lingered latest at this fag-end of England, only vanishing before the advance of the steam-engine.

Aunt Jooly's most profitable office was that of monthly nurse. In this capacity she had been useful to Mrs. Peters, and out of this service there had arisen a very familiar acquaintance between the matron and the crone. The old woman claimed a right of possession in the three fine boys whose cradles she had rocked, and whose strong young limbs she had swaddled. She talked of them as 'my boys,' and gave them her toothless jaws to kiss. She dropped in at the cottage of an evening when Mark was out of the way, and was fed and made much of. She had always the latest village scandal to relate solemnly, eking out a scanty modicum of fact with hints and prophetic suggestions of deepest interest. And when the teapot had been drained and the local news exhausted, and the last morsel of buttered toast had been munched, Aunt Jooly drew a pack of well-thumbed cards out of her capacious pocket, and told her entertainer's fortune.

It was curious how Molly Peters—a hard-headed acute young woman, with an intellect of small range, but sharp as a needle—hung on this dirty oracle. The three rows of greasy cards, each card laid slowly on the table with a sharp dab from a resolute thumb, were to her as the voice of Fate. For the moment she believed implicitly. When she was told that she lay to have her wish, her soul thrilled within her, for Molly's wish was always the same hungry desire to see herself mistress at Place. There must be death for one and sorrow for some before this could come to pass; but Molly thought of such death and sorrow as lightly as she would have thought of a shallow river that must be forded ere she could enter a shining golden city full of pleasure and all good things.

When Aunt Jooly, bending knitted brows over the cards, and for ever wetting that bony thumb of hers to grip those oracles more surely, told Mrs. Peters that a dark man wished evil to her, or that a fair man lay to do her a kindness, that knave of spades or that king of hearts was to her an actual enemy or friend

—a traitor whose machinations were to be guarded against, or an ally whose friendship was to be counted upon.

On one particular evening, early in the new year, when Aunt Jooly had dropped in to the usual entertainment of tea and toast, the fair and friendly man had been more prominent than usual in the three rows of dirty cards. Cut them as often as she pleased, that king of hearts always came to the front, and never turned his back upon Molly's representative, a snub-nosed queen of clubs.

'T'es odd how well he lays towards you,' said Aunt Jooly, 'and how he turns his back upon the fair woman. You never had a better friend. And now for your wish.'

There was some mysterious manipulation of the cards, another cut, and a prolonged scrutiny.

'I believe you'll get your wish, and before long,' said the fortune-teller. 'There's a journey before you—but not a long one.'

'No!' cried Molly, breathless; for the oracle had been unfriendly to that wish of hers hitherto.

'There's a journey. You turn your back upon the house, you see—that means you're to leave home. Yes, I believe you'll have your wish, and it won't be long first.'

Molly clasped her hands under the table. They were damp with suppressed agitation. Such a vulgar oracle, and she such a sensible woman! Yet she could not help believing in any omen that promised the fulfilment of her desire. The cards were put back into the deep pocket, a mysterious receptacle, which Aunt Jooly wore buried among her numerous petticoats, and which would have defied the most accomplished swell-mobsmen in London. The two women drew nearer the cheerful fire. It was a frosty night, and the north-east wind was shrieking round the cottage, and the tall poplar by the gate was creaking and groaning as if he meant to snap asunder presently and smash somebody.

'How dull ye be to-night, my dear!' said Aunt Jooly. 'You've nary word to throw at a dog, and you was that contrary with my boys just now. Has anything gone askew?'

'Everything's askew,' answered Mary Peters gloomily. 'Do you think it's pleasant to live the lonesome life I lead, with the workhouse to look forward to if Mark were to die before his brother?'

'That ar'n't likely, my dear.'

'I hope not; but who can tell? Life seems all at sixes and sevens sometimes. It's smooth enough for the Squire's wife—an estate worth six hundred a year settled on her for life, whether she behaves well or ill. That's what her pretty face has done for her. But what has mine done for me? And yet I was counted a beauty in my time. What have I got to look forward to?'

Wrinkles and gray hairs, old age and poverty. Let's talk of something else, Aunt Jooly. It don't do for me to brood on my troubles. You know plenty of strange stories, don't you? You used to make my flesh creep sometimes, when I was lying on my bed of a winter evening in the firelight. Do you remember that story about Ruth Tregarvan, who was hanged for poisoning her husband thirty years ago?

'She was a fool, my dear,' said the crone, shaking her head, — 'Ruth was a fool. She used arsenic. Any doctor can tell arsenic when he sees it. Lord, my dear, there's things as d'grow in the hedges that the doctors know nowt of; but it's lucky for folks that it's only an old ooman like me that has found out the secret o' they things.'

CHAPTER XXV.

MOLLY GETS HER WISH.

'SHE were an ignorant young woman, my dear,' pursued Aunt Jooly, when Mrs. Peters had mixed for her that gentle stimulant which was required to settle the tea and toast on an elderly stomach. 'If she'd knawed what I d' know she never wud ha' gived Sam Tregarvan arsenic; he were that tryin', he wur, my luv, and I must say I felt for Ruth, tho' she were a wicked, hard-hearted, young woman. He drank like a fish, and when he was drunk he bate her; and tho' she'd been a good-looking, smart, young woman when he marr'd her, she got to be such a poor whisht thing, and you wouldn't ha' gived sex-pence for all the clothes on her back—a reg'lar drab, that's what she came to be, my dear. Nobody 'ud ha' thought there was such wickedness in her; she were daft like. Yet she were artful, my dear. One day when Sam came home from work she gave him a cold pasty. "I don't much like the taste of this here," he says; "there's some'ut queer about it, p'r'aps the mate warn't good." "P'r'aps tes the parsley," she says. So he grumbles, and were a bit picksome; but he goes on eatin', as they always does, poor doomed things. And in the night he has pains and gripes, and can't go to work next mornin'. Next day he makes use of some gruel as she made for him, and he grumbles again about the taste of it; but she scolds him for bein' that fanciful, and so he clunks it up; and then he d' get that bad, and he d' go on gettin' worsen, tell he d' die; and just when the death-rattle's in his throat, Ruth d' tear up street distracted like, and call doctor. She tells doctor that her man ha' been atin' sour apples, and that they'd laid hard on his stomach; and that he'd had the spasms that bad, she thought he'd twisted

something inside him, like Farmer Scott's horse that died at the beginning of the summer. But the neighbours had bin in and out, hearin' Sam's groans, and they was able to tell the doctor a great deal that Ruth didn't care to tell him. "This looks like poison," says Dr. Didcott; "have you any rat's-bane about?" "No," says Ruth, "not that she knawed of; but Sam was always close and fond of hidin' things in corners, and she had once heerd un talk of gettin' some stuff to kill the rats. There was lots of 'em about the place, she d' say, and they ran in and out as tame as kittens." "Then you've been mixing some of the stuff with your flour," says the doctor. "Lord forbid!" says she. "I took the flour from the top shelf of the cupboard." So Dr. Didcott gets up on a cheer and sarches the cupboard, and there sure enough in a corner was some white powder screwed up in a bit of paper. "What's this, Mrs. Tregarvan?" he asks. "Salt," says she. "No, it isn't," says he. "It's arsenic—deadly poison." Then she dropped down on the floor, and went off with a screech into strong hysterics. Two of the neighbours was by all the time, and they could hardly 'ould her. She went out of one fit into another, and her screeches was awful. "Be quiet, can't 'ee!" says Dr. Didcott, brutal like. "Your screeching won't bring him to life; if it cud, you wouldn't screech. You don't want un back again." Then he whispers to a lad that stood lookin' in at the door, and ten minutes after the lad comes back with a constable, and he takes Ruth Tregarvan to jail. And at the inquest it comes out that Sam had never been knawed to buy any stuff for the rats, but that Ruth had bought the arsenic six months before at Launceston. It was all brought home to her at assizes, and she was hanged. And I say again, she was a fool; for instead of buyin' arsenic, she might ha' gathered a handful of innocent flowers in the hedges that would have taken Sam off as quiet as an infant.'

'What flowers, Aunt Jooly?' asked Molly.

She was sitting on a low stool in a corner by the fender, half in shadow, the room dimly lighted by a single candle, and the glow of a fire that was dying down to ashes. She lifted her bright dark eyes to the crone's withered face, which made a diabolical shadow on the ceiling, and waited with a look of eager interest for the witch's reply; and yet this story of Ruth Tregarvan was as familiar to Mary Peters as the immortal fairy tales that are so dear to childhood. She had heard the ghastly tale many a time in the long winter evenings. She had felt a morbid interest in all the loathsome details of a vulgar village murder; but she had never till to-night troubled herself about those simpler instruments of death at which the herbalist hinted—the innocent-seeming leaves and blossoms, roots and berries, of the woodland and the hedgerow.

'No, my dear, I'm not a-goin' to tell you that,' said the wise woman, with a solemn shake of her head. 'Nobody's any the better for knowin' such things as that.'

'Nor any the worse either, unless they're as wicked as Ruth Tregarvan,' answered Molly, with a scornful laugh. 'You don't suppose I'm going to poison Mark or the boys, do you?'

'Lord love you, my dear, who ever thought of such a thing! But folks have no cause to know such things as can do them no good. I've sarched and larned the flowers and weeds that d' grow in the fields, so that I might use 'em for people's welfare. I don't want to larn anybody the harm there is in 'em. There's not a herb but I know its power to cure folks or to hurt 'em, but I never used my knowledge against so much as a kitten.'

'You needn't make such a fuss, Aunt Jooly,' said Molly. 'Do you suppose I don't know something about hedge flowers as well as you? There's Deadly Nightshade, now, that's poison. I've warned the boys many a time against picking the ripe berries. They might take them for sloes, you know. And there's Fool's Parsley.'

'Death poison.'

'Was it one of those you meant that Ruth Tregarvan might have used?'

'No, my dear. There's other things not so easy found out. But I'm not going to tell you about 'em. You might be telling other folks.'

'What a foolish old woman you are!' exclaimed Molly impatiently. 'Keep your knowledge to yourself. I'm not going to tamper with herbs that may cure or kill you, as chance goes. I daresay you'll be poisoning somebody by mistake one of these days, giving them an overdose of your dandelions or your nightshades, and then you'll get into trouble, like Ruth Tregarvan.'

'My dear, I know what I'm doing,' answered the beldame, bridling with offended dignity. 'I'm an old woman, but my sight is better than many a young one's. Why, 'tes but a month since I cured Mrs. Doyle, the farmer's wife, of heart-spasms, with fox-glove tea; and if I hadn't knawed just the right quantity to give her I might ha' killed her, for there's no deadlier poison than the young leaves of the foxglove, if you're not careful how you make use of them.'

'How's Mrs. Lanherne getting on with that sickly eldest girl of hers?' asked Molly, who seemed all at once to have wearied of the discussion which had interested her keenly a few minutes ago; and then the conversation became purely local. Aunt Jooly knew everything about her neighbours, from the great scandals which agitate a community to the pettiest details of daily life. She was much more interesting than a county paper. Mrs. Peters brewed another dose of that comforting mixture

which for personal use the village herbalist preferred to any of her own decoctions, and the evening wore itself out in the discussion of that weakness of character and general faultiness which are the distinguishing element in the history of other people. Aunt Jooly and her hostess discoursed at much length upon Mrs. Lanherne's foolish indulgence of her sickly girl, her husband's growing fondness for the bottle, Dr. Didcott's indebtedness to Giles the butcher, Mrs. Nichols's reprehensible extravagance in bonnets; and much more of the same order.

Mark appeared next evening at dusk. He had brightened wonderfully since the adjustment of affairs at the quarries. He was working his hardest, and had honestly resolved never again to touch a sixpence of his brother's money. He had spent less time at the King's Arms of late, and had forsworn brandy-and-water. And now, instead of wasting the best part of the evening at billiards, he came straight from the quarries to Molly's cosy tea-table, and had a romp with the three boys while the tea was brewing, and a steak was being grilled for him in the adjacent kitchen. When the meal was finished and the boys sent off to bed, Molly began to talk seriously. She was a cautious woman, and seldom discussed things freely before her sons.

'When are you going to send those boys to school?' she asked, with her elbows on the table, and her bright black eyes fixed on Mark's face.

'I was thinking of it,' he answered feebly.

'Yes. But you're always thinking of things, and they're no nearer being done when you've been thinking of them for a twelvemonth. Those boys want schooling, and they can't get it in Camelot. I won't have them looked down upon by those that are their inferiors, if all was known. I've taught Jack and Phil to read and write and cipher; and baby knows his letters, and can spell out a page nicely in words of one syllable. That's enough to start them at a preparatory school. And I've heard of a suitable school at St. Columb, where they can be taken for five-and-twenty pounds a year, and no extras except the laundress.'

'Seventy-five pounds a year!' said Mark despondently. 'That will be a pull for me.'

'Nonsense, Mark. They cost you something here, don't they? They don't live upon air, I can tell you. The schoolmistress has a good character for feeding her boys, or I wouldn't trust my children with her. Jack and Phil must go to school at once, that's certain, for they're getting too much for me to manage; and while we're about it we may just as well send Harry.'

'You're in a tremendous hurry to get rid of them,' said Mark. 'Yet you're always grumbling about your loneliness. You'll be ever so much more lonely when the boys are gone.'

'I'll put up with that,' answered this Spartan mother. 'That's my look-out.'

'But it will be my look-out if you fret about them.'

'I see how it is,' retorted Mrs. Peters snappishly. 'You begrudge the money it will cost you to make those boys gentlemen. You'd rather they grew up heathens and ignoramuses.'

'No fear of that, Molly, with you. A sharp clever woman like you can teach her sons as well as any of your preparatory schoolmistresses; and by and by we might send them to Helstone Grammar School, and make men of them.'

'I'm not going to send them to the other end of Cornwall. You'd better offer to send them to America at once. They must learn Latin and Greek, and ever so much that I can't teach, before they can go to a public school. And I'm told that this Miss Powle at St. Columb is a capital teacher, and knows more than half your university students.'

'I'll turn it over in my mind,' said Mark.

'And I'll make them new shirts, and get their clothes ready,' said Molly.

She had her big motherly work-basket handy, and began stitching away at a small longcloth garment there and then, as if to let Mark see how thoroughly she was in earnest.

'What's the news up yonder?' she asked presently, when Mark had sunk down in his armchair and stretched his slippered feet across the hearth, in languid restfulness.

'Up yonder' always meant Place.

'O, nothing particular. Mrs. Trevornock and her daughter have gone away—'

'They stayed long enough, I think,' interjected Molly, with a contemptuous laugh. 'The old lady gets plenty out of her son-in-law.'

'Why shouldn't they stay? They're in nobody's way, and they brighten up the dull old house.'

'No doubt. A pretty girl is always an ornament in a house,' sneered Molly, snapping her thread, in the energy of her last stitch.

'You mean Flossie,' said Mark.

'I mean Miss Trevornock. I wasn't aware you called her by her pet name. I didn't know you had got quite so far as that!'

'There's nothing in that. Every one calls her Flossie. She's a nice lively girl, with no pretence about her. But as for her prettiness, she's not as handsome as you by a long way, so you needn't be jealous of her.'

'Who said I was jealous of her?' asked Molly, soothed by this assurance. 'I'm not jealous of a turn-up-nosed chit like that; but I am angry when I think that other people can stay as long

as ever they like at Place—while I, who have a better right than anybody, am not allowed to cross the threshold.'

'That will all come right in time, Molly.'

'It might have come right years ago if you weren't a coward. Your brother has had his fancy, why shouldn't you have yours?'

'My brother has got the property, and he can do what he likes,' answered Mark. 'There's no use arguing about it, my dear. Every man has a right to marry to please himself; but so he has to dispose of his property. You heard what Maulford said. If there are no children up yonder, I shall come in for the whole estate, except the Hallworthy property, unless my brother takes it into his head to disinherit me. Knowing that, why should I run the risk of offending him?'

'Suppose Vyvyan outlives you? What's to become of me and my boys then?'

'It isn't very kind of you to suggest such a chance, Molly. Vyvyan is eleven years older than I am, and I don't think I'm particularly shaky.'

Mrs. Peters sat with her work in her lap, staring at the fire. There were no bright castles, no gates of paradise, for her dreamy eye in the red cavernous coals. The vision she saw there was of the workhouse and all its hardships. She saw herself a penniless widow, with three hungry orphans, suing for help at the rich man's door, and being refused.

'There must be something done,' she said to herself. 'Things can't go on like this.'

Mark slowly dropped a remark now and then, as he smoked his cigar and sipped his gin-and-water; but conversation by the domestic hearth was by no means lively.

'Has your sister come home yet?' asked Molly, by and by.

'Yes, she's back again, and extra pious since she's been to Plymouth. She's been sitting under the last evangelical light which has illuminated that part of the world, and she talks as big about him as if he were the comet we're to have this year. She's been as sour as varjuice ever since she came home. Thomasine Tudway, who has been her own maid for the last ten years, and whom she had trained to be an exaggerated copy of herself, took to flirting ways at Plymouth, stopped out late of a Sunday evening, and was seen walking with a sailor on the Hoe; so my sister turned her off at a minute's warning, and the young woman did the best thing she could do under the circumstances—went and married the sailor. And now Priscilla has nobody to look after her frills and furbelows, fetch and carry for her, and put up with her tempers, and flatter her into good-humour, for I believe that was Tudway's chief office. She says she means to be uncommonly particular about the next maid she engages

She will have no flighty minx, she says—Tudway must have been at least thirty when she began to be volatile—but a steady middle-aged woman, respectably brought up, and with a decent education. Tudway was upper-housemaid when Priscilla took a fancy to her, and could neither read nor write. Poor Pris took no end of trouble in teaching and training her.’

Molly listened intently, but had no comment to make. Deepest thoughtfulness had come upon her while Mark was talking. He fancied she was half asleep, as she sat looking down at the neglected fire.

He mixed himself a second tumbler of grog. When a man has turned over a new leaf as regards billiards and brandy-and-water in a tavern, he may surely enjoy the domestic glass without scruple. They sat for some time in a comfortable silence. Then suddenly Mary Peters jumped up from her chair, perched herself upon Mark’s knee, and put her arm round his neck. She was light enough and young enough yet to commit this audacity without ungainliness ; but the action was not the less startling to Mark. It was so long since she had been sportive or caressing in her treatment of him. A heavy gloom had fallen of late years on his household life, and had made the burden of his folly wearisome to bear.

‘Why, Molly, what’s in the wind now?’ he asked, smiling up at her eager face. ‘Do you want a new gown? Shall I bring down the dog-cart to-morrow, and drive you over to Launceston?’

Those bright dark eyes, with their look of concentrated thought, the faint quiver of the full underlip, showed an emotion too strong to be caused by a mere idle longing for new gowns, even in the shallowest of souls. A nature absolutely shallow could hardly express its inner longings by such a look ; but an evil nature might so reveal the sudden inspiration of an unholy thought.

‘No, Mark, I want no gowns ; I want to go to Place.’

‘My dear, you know it’s impossible.’

‘It is possible, it is easy, with a little good management. The plan has all formed itself in my mind within the last five minutes. I am going to Place as your sister’s servant. Nobody knows me up there. I have been such a stay-at-home ever since I have lived here, that there’s only a few Camelot people know me ; and the Place servants hardly ever come down to Camelot. Rockport is their nearest town, you see, if you can call it a town. You can manage it all for me, if you like. Mrs. Nichols will give me a letter of recommendation ; you can get Nichols to ask her. Don’t pull a long face, Mark ; Nichols will do anything for you. I want nothing but that letter. I can do all the rest myself.’

'What's the use?' asked Mark, sorely puzzled at this strange fancy. 'Why should you lower yourself to go there as a servant? What can you gain by it?'

'Everything. I can get round your brother. I never saw the man yet I couldn't manage, if I tried. Why, I used to twist old Lanherne round my fingers, when his wife dared not say yes—ay, nor no—to him. Let me go, Mark. You have no idea the good I can bring about for you if I once get a footing at Place. As for your sister, I shall be able to manage her better than you manage your horse Pepper, though that isn't saying much.'

'It's a mad scheme, Molly; and you'll get me into trouble,' grumbled Mark.

'I'll get you out of trouble, if you'll only trust me,' answered Molly, looking into his pale perplexed eyes with dark intensity, with a look that mastered and compelled his feeble spirit.

They sat late discussing Molly's scheme, and Mark argued long; but he argued feebly, and in the end, as the weaker vessel had foreseen from the beginning, the stronger vessel was conquered.

It was late when Mark came back to the cottage next evening. He had returned to his old haunt at Camelot, the stuffy parlour and the still stuffier billiard-room, not for pleasure this time, but for a very unpleasant piece of business. He had pledged his word to Molly that he would get Mrs. Nichols to give her a written character, recommending her to Miss Penruth as a pious and estimable widow, reduced in circumstances, and anxious to enter just such a service as Miss Penruth's, no meaner or less holy atmosphere being congenial to a mind which had not fallen with her fortunes. When Mark left the cottage in the morning, he carried Molly's rough draft of the letter in his pocket. All that was required of Mrs. Nichols was to copy that draft, and to lend the document the weight and authority of her name. Mary had not chosen this lady as her instrument at random. She knew the person she had to deal with. Mrs. Nichols was one of those easy-tempered weak-minded women who are always doing something for somebody, and always getting done in return. She had given excellent characters to the most execrable of servants, rather than that those vipers—who had warmed themselves at her hearth and stung her—should fail to find some other nest in which to develop their evil instincts. She had fed the hungry, and the hungry had stolen her spoons. She gave away her old garments before she was certain of getting new ones. She had endured the ingratitude of sisters-in-law, the insolence of cousins; yet her spare room was at the disposal of any relative who chose to claim it; and the guest who departed to-day shaking the dust from her shoes, or, metaphorically, spitting upon the doorstep,

might return to-morrow sure of a friendly welcome from Mrs Nichols.

To Mr. Nichols, who had a broad good-nature which embraced all humanity, and kept only an odd corner for his wife and children, Mark hesitatingly expounded Mrs. Peters's views; how for the last ten years she had been pining to see the inside of Place, and to become acquainted with the Penruth family generally, and how she now saw a way to gratifying this desire without risk to Mark. All she required was a letter of introduction from a respectable matron. Her own cleverness would do the rest. Mr. Nichols pulled one of his whiskers thoughtfully as he read the rough draft. The two men had the tavern-parlour to themselves, while their friends congregated in the billiard-room.

'It's rather like giving a false character, isn't it?' said the veterinary surgeon dubiously. 'It would never do for my wife to do such a thing as that, you know.'

'It wouldn't be the first time if she did. Look at that girl Sarah. Your wife recommended her to my—to Mrs. Peters, as a model of sobriety, honesty, and industry; and the hussy drank half a bottle of gin in an afternoon, and proved herself the laziest young thief that was ever let out of jail.'

'That was my wife's kindness,' explained Nichols. 'She couldn't refuse to give the girl a chance.'

'Well, let her give Mrs. Peters a chance. She's no thief or drunkard. I suppose you know that she's respectable?'

'As far as being honest in her dealings and neat and industrious, and keeping herself to herself,' faltered Joe Nichols, 'I haven't a word to say against her. But to recommend her to your sister as a pious and moral character, when—'

'When you don't know whether she has any right to the wedding-ring she wears,' interjected Mark. 'Is that what you mean, Joe?'

'Something like that.'

'Then make your mind easy on that score. She's a lawfully-wedded wife, and a true and faithful wife, and in due time she'll be properly declared as such.'

'I understand,' said Nichols, 'and I have always thought as much, or my wife would never have asked her to tea.'

'She never has asked her to her tea-parties,' growled Mark.

'Not to a set party, perhaps—Camelot people are so strait-laced. But to a friendly drop in, you know; and I'm sure Mrs. Peters prefers that. Well, Mark, the letter shall be written; and if my wife ever gets into trouble about it, you must stand by her.'

'I'll tell you what,' said Mark, in a gush of gratitude, 'you shall have the bay horse. I'll make you a present of him. Give

him a good long run at grass, and I believe he'll come round, and be as sound as a roach.'

'Not if he was at grass till the Day of Judgment,' answered Joe, with conviction; 'but I thank you all the same, Mark. I think I know where I can plant him. If I get twenty pound for him, you shall have a dozen of old cognac for your cellar at the cottage—something better than the fire-water Lanherne gives us.'

The surgeon went home with Molly's rough draft in his pocket, promising that the letter should be written that night, under his own superintendence, and forwarded to the cottage early in the morning. So Mark felt that the first important step was taken in a journey fraught with danger; yet he was weak enough to feel glad that he could carry home favourable news to Mrs. Mary Peters.

He opened the door and went into the parlour. There was no light but the fire-glow, and a strange woman was sitting by the hearth. Mark drew back, and was retiring to look for the mistress of the house, wondering who this unfamiliar gossip might be, when the stranger startled him still more by a ringing laugh, which he knew very well as the laughter of Mary Peters.

'Light the candle and use your eyes, Mark,' she said; and the voice as well as the laughter was Mary's.

'What's the joke?' asked Mark, mystified and somewhat angry. 'What do you mean by making a guy of yourself?'

'There's no joke in it,' answered Mrs. Peters. 'I want you to tell me how I look as a respectable widow in reduced circumstances.'

Mark had lighted the candle by this time, and he fell back a pace or two, and surveyed the transformed figure which offered itself to his inspection.

Mrs. Peters had braided and sleeked her dark hair in two stiff bands, of the order best described as 'window-curtains.' These narrowed a forehead already narrow, and lengthened the natural oval of the face. The widow's-cap, fastened under the chin, the scanty black-stuff gown and broad lawn-collar, gave a puritanical look to one whose usual aspect suggested smartness and coquetry. Altogether the change was startling, and even those who had best known Mary Peters might be slow to discover their acquaintance of the flashing eye and vivacious lip in this grave and discreet-looking widow.

'I don't suppose any of the servants at Place have ever seen me,' she said. 'But even if they had, do you think they'd know me again?'

'Not in that rig-out,' answered Mark. 'You're a wonderful woman, Molly; and when you set your heart upon anything, I believe you'd walk over red-hot ploughshares to get it.'

'I would,' she answered, with a look that almost scared him. 'Have you got the letter?'

'Mrs. Nichols is to send it round to-morrow morning. Joe acted like a brick.'

'So much the better for him when—'

'When what, Molly?'

'If ever you come into your rights.'

CHAPTER XXVI.

IN THE WANING YEAR.

BARBARA was alone once more in the bleak blank beginning of the year—the dead dull time when the days lengthen, yet bring neither leaf nor flower; when the skies are gray, and rain-drops lash the pane, and the snow lies in the hollow of the hill, and the ravenous east wind roams over the earth seeking whom it may devour; when all the traditional joys, or simulations and appearances of joy, that belong to Christmas are over and done with, and the comforts of the fireside have begun to pall even upon the most domestic mind. Those first months of the new year are always up-hill work; save perhaps to the sportsman, who has infinite delight in horse and hound, gun and dog, and to whom the first violet is an affliction and the yellow April butterfly a bore.

Alone, or almost alone, in her castle on the Cornish moor, Barbara found the early year a period of exceeding gloom. There was much rain at that time, and save for an occasional gleam at close of day the sun hid his face, and it was as if there had been no such luminary to gladden the world; for it was difficult to believe that the dull gray light of those short winter days came from the round red-gold face of that jovial Sol who glorifies the midsummer roses, and who in autumn makes the decay and corruption of dying Nature more splendid than her freshness and bloom.

Miss Penruth had returned from Plymouth renewed in her strength, like that very sun, which rejoiceth to run his race. Having made herself more than ever secure of a freehold in the skies, she was so much the less inclined to make herself agreeable to her fellow-mortals upon earth. She did not actually lecture Barbara, but she took every occasion of talking at her. She would remark, for instance, *apropos* to nothing, that some people's lives were so frivolous and futile that it was a wonder they were permitted to go on living. At other times, when inveighing against the riot and wastefulness of the servants'-hall—which,

she was thankful to say, she had always kept in ~~check~~, so long as she had any authority—she would observe, as a general proposition, that people who had been reared upon a pittance often showed a natural bent to lavish expenditure and self-indulgence, whenever the opportunity for those vices arose.

Barbara received these stealthy thrusts with a provoking indifference. She cared too little for Miss Penruth to be affected by that lady's bad opinion. She was not hypocrite enough to attempt conciliation.

'If I tried to live pleasantly with her I should be pretending all day long,' she told herself; 'and it is no part of my duty to falsify my own nature in order that I may please Miss Penruth.'

So the two women went their own several ways. Priscilla wrote long letters to other Priscillas, and read the last new book by the last new light in the evangelical world, which volume generally prophesied the approaching destruction of this planet, taking the Crimean war and the Indian mutiny as the preliminary explosions which heralded the final crash.

Barbara lived her joyless eventless life almost alone, save when at her husband's request she put on her fur-lined jacket and sat beside him in his dog-cart, while he drove to look at distant farms and scold faulty farmers. She sorely missed her mother and Flossie. She was full of fear about that distant struggle which was not yet finished.

Miss Penruth had by this time recovered from the shock of Thomasine Tudway's ingratitude, and had obtained for herself a new handmaiden and confidant of a very superior stamp to the deceitful Thomasine. The new attendant—a being so intensely respectable could hardly be spoken of as a lady's maid—was a widow; young, but serious beyond her years; soft of foot and grave of voice and aspect; a person who had known trouble, had passed through the furnace of disappointment, and had been purified in the fire of adversity. Such a dependant was a treasure above price to a lady of Priscilla's temper. Priscilla liked adulation, and here was some one to offer it, a living fountain of flattery which never ran dry. Priscilla gloried in her piety, and here was some one whose evangelical graces only stopped short at the point where they would have become presumption. The maid was only a little less enlightened than her mistress, as Plato to Socrates, or Mason to Walpole. Priscilla had nothing but praise for this estimable widow, whose name was Morris.

Thus the young year wore on. Mark sold a couple of horses at a ruinous loss, and gave away another; and having thus depopulated his stable, save of the admirable Pepper and a sturdy brown cob, ugly and fiddle-headed, but of inexhaustible energies and an immeasurable capacity for wrong-doing, the manager

of the quarries devoted himself to business with a steadiness which was highly pleasing to his elder brother. Business thoughts and business cares gave him a preoccupied air occasionally ; but nobody at Place wanted him to be lively. Dulness and silence were in the very atmosphere of the shadowy old house, where Flossie's gaiety had seemed always a discordant note.

So the dull year wore on. June brought her roses and nightingales ; July filled the hedgerows with ferns and foxgloves, and changed winter's gray sea to an ocean more glorious than jasper or amethyst. And swift on summer's beauty came autumn's slow decay, and the skies were thunder-charged, and the last of the reapers were busy on the upland fields. It was in the waning of the year that an added and unwonted gloom deepened the shadow of Barbara's joyless home. Vyvyan, who hardly knew what it was to be ill, began to feel that his prime of life and the sense of power that goes with it were departing. Something, he could scarce explain what, was amiss with him. He could no longer endure the fatigue of long rides and long fasting. He who scarce knew the meaning of weakness felt himself suddenly, and at intervals, as feeble as an infant.

'Can this be age?' he asked himself angrily. 'Have I become an old man all at once—at fifty? It is not possible; yet I feel like an old man—a feeble old creature, tottering on the brink of the grave. It must be something organic.'

And then the cold sweat, which he had felt so often of late, gathered on his brow, as he remembered how his father had been cut off in the fulness and flower of life by heart-disease, unsuspected till the blow came. Remembering this, and feeling this strange torpor creeping over him, this deadly fainting, this dimness of vision, this terrible necessity of lying on his sofa, helpless, inert, till the fit passed, Vyvyan Penruth believed himself a doomed man.

'I am like the rich man in the parable,' he said to himself. 'Of what account are my lands and my houses? To me, too, the awful voice has sounded: "Thou fool, this night thy soul shall be required of thee." Yes, I am doomed, and she will marry her soldier-lover and be happy; happy, as she has never been with me; loving, as she has never been to me; beloved—no, never more fondly than she might have been by me. The husk is rough and ugly, but there was a true heart at the core, if she would have had it.'

Then, after a long blank pause, in which the pulse beat slowly, and that icy dew gathered on the haggard brow, and all things grew dim before the clouded sight, Vyvyan began to wonder, with a vague self-pity, what his little world would be like after he was dead.

His chief thought was of his wife.

'Will she be sorry for me when I am gone?' he asked himself. 'Of course she will marry that other man—a hero, famous, a man for a woman to love; but when she is a happy wife, a happy mother, will she think of me kindly, regretfully even, and say to herself sometimes, "He was a rough queer creature, but he loved me. Such as it was, after its kind, his was true love"?'

He suffered, and held his peace about this new strange suffering. For some time he would tell no one of his illness, neither wife nor sister, not even one of those old servants who had served him since he was a boy. Nor had he yet made up his mind to consult a doctor. The fits came upon him generally at the same time of the day, when he was alone in his study, after breakfast. He had found that lying down on his sofa gave him relief. He would lie there quiescent till the fit passed, and he was his own man again. On two or three occasions the symptoms were more violent, and he had some difficulty in concealing his illness from the household. He shrank with a strange aversion from the revelation of his weakness. He felt like a king discrowned, who could yet maintain the semblance of royalty. He did not want them to know that his race was all but run, that he was of no significance in the world, a mere passing shadow, with that hour when he should vanish from the scene already marked upon the dial. He who possessed so much found it bitter to contemplate that near future in which his possessions must slip into other hands. If people knew that a mortal disease had its grip upon him, they would begin to calculate how long he would last—how many months or days they would have to wait for wealth and liberty. His wife, Priscilla, Mark, each of these would profit by his death, and each must desire it. To sit amidst them and know that they were calculating every hour, counting every breath he drew—that their hopes waxed strong with the pallid hue of disease, waned when his cheek brightened—this would be too horrible.

'I'll keep the truth from them as long as I can,' he said to himself. 'Better that I should hold on to the last, and drop like a felled tree.'

Sometimes he thought he would go away and wait for death in some distant land, tended by strangers, who would be losers when he died. But to leave his wife, to leave his land, that land which was to him as a living thing, so fondly had he watched over its welfare!

No, he would be lord of the soil to the last.

'God help the estate when Mark owns it!' he thought. 'He'll be a careless landlord. He'll let his tenants sell their straw, perhaps, and break up some of the fine old pastures. And not another acre of the moor will be redeemed in his time. Things will stand still, at the best.'

O soul-torturing thought, that these things must go to another, a careless owner, possibly a spendthrift, who would let the ancestral estate melt away acre by acre, till the Penruths ceased to have name or place in the world. Better, perhaps, to be a beggar and lie down in a corner to die, under some dark archway, or in a stranger's porch, and to let the slough of this tired body slip off the immortal soul like a worn-out garment, of no more value or account than penury's rags and tatters, than to be a rich man anchored to earth by the weight of many acres, and much cattle, houses, money, and mines.

'How little use I have made of it all!' thought Vyvyan. 'I might have lived as happily on a pound a week.'

One day his wife went into his study to consult him upon some household arrangement, it being her habit to defer to him in all things, and found him lying on the sofa, inert, with a cold dew upon his forehead.

'Are you ill, Vyvyan?' she asked, kneeling by his side.

'A little faint,' he faltered, hardly able to answer her. 'It will pass off—presently.'

'Let me get you something; I am sure you are very ill. No, don't stir,' as he tried to rise, and fell back again on the pillow, her face growing dim before his clouded sight; 'I'll ring.'

'No; don't let the servants see!' he gasped; but she had rung the bell.

It was answered by Priscilla's inestimable widow.

'I beg your pardon, ma'am; but I was passing, and the bell rang so loud. I was afraid—'

'Yes, quite right. Mr. Penruth has fainted. Bring some brandy directly, please, Morris.'

The devoted Morris tripped lightly away, while Barbara knelt by her husband's side, chafing his cold hands, gazing anxiously at his haggard face.

He was not insensible, but his eyes had a strange sightless look, though the pupils were unnaturally dilated.

'I don't know what it means,' he gasped presently. 'I feel as if I was sinking through the sofa—through the floor; a horrid feeling.'

Barbara was holding his clammy hands in her own, which fear made almost as cold. She had little experience of sickness, and this was so strange a sickness.

Mrs. Morris came back with a spirit-decanter and a glass. Barbara poured out some brandy, and persuaded Vyvyan to drink it. He obeyed her with a mechanical air, like a sleep-walker, and then fell back again into his recumbent position.

The brandy revived him; a faint colour came back to his leaden cheeks, his breathing grew more regular, and that horrible sensation of sinking through the sofa gradually left him.

'Don't mention—to my sister—or any one—that I have been—ill,' he said to Mrs. Morris.

'I shall obey you, of course, sir,' replied the widow, with grave respect; 'but do you not think Miss Penruth ought to know? Mrs. Penruth is so young and so inexperienced, and if there were anything serious in the attack she might be at a loss how to act or what to suggest.'

'Fiddlestick!' ejaculated Vyvyan testily. 'You talk as if I was a sick baby. Do you suppose I don't know how to take care of my own health, woman? I don't want half a dozen of your fussy sex fidgeting about me. One's enough.'

'You ought to see a doctor, Vyvyan, and immediately,' said his wife, with gentle insistence.

'I am not going to be hauled about, and prodded, and listened to by some spectacled humbug in Savile-row,' answered Vyvyan. 'If there is anything organically wrong with me, no doctor living can set me right. Ten to one but the cleverest of them would make a wrong guess, and shorten my days by his experiments. Or at best he would put me on a regimen that would prolong my life for a year or so, at the cost of making it a burden to me. If my complaint is only a passing disorder it will go as it came, without drugs or surgery.'

'But, sir,' pleaded Mrs. Morris, 'for the satisfaction of your friends.'

'My friends must be satisfied with leaving me alone,' said Vyvyan, who had rallied wonderfully after that glass of brandy. 'There is absolutely nothing amiss with me. I have ridden too much of late. That horse my brother bought is a tremendous puller. There, you can go, Morris; and, remember, not a word to my sister.'

Barbara was dismissed soon afterwards, and Vyvyan went about his daily business seeming none the worse for his sudden attack of faintness. Days passed, and he suffered no recurrence of those strange sensations, that sudden standing still of the clockwork within him, while the world without grew clouded and dim. He began to think the indisposition, whatever it was, had passed away, and that he should be troubled no more.

'Indigestion, or liver, I daresay,' he said to himself.

Too soon had he rejoiced. Just a week after that morning on which his wife had surprised him, the fit came on again, in less than half an hour after he had taken his morning draught of honest home-brewed beer. He eat little or nothing for breakfast, and was in the habit of refreshing himself with a draught of beer before he sat down to his letter-writing or newspaper-reading.

He felt the deadly torpor creeping over him, the dull lethargic sensation, and remembering how brandy had revived him on the

last occasion, he rushed to the door, opened it, and called out, in a voice loud enough to reach the pantry at the end of the passage,

‘James—Dickson—some brandy!’

He came face to face with Didcott, the Camelot apothecary, who was family doctor at Place, earning from twenty to thirty pounds a year by occasional attendances on Miss Penruth and the servants.

‘What the deuce brought you here?’ gasped Vyvyan.

He had no strength to stand another minute, but reeled and fell back on the sofa, and lay there like a log. Didcott took the brandy-bottle and glass quietly from the servant at the door, and administered a dose. Then he knelt down by the sofa and felt Vyvyan’s pulse. Startled by that slow pulse, he took a stethoscope out of his hat, opened the Squire’s waistcoat, and listened to the beating of his heart.

‘Is it very serious?’ Vyvyan asked, after a silence that seemed long.

‘Well, it is rather serious,’ Didcott answered thoughtfully. ‘There’s the same feeble action as in your father’s case. It’s wonderful how these constitutional peculiarities repeat themselves in families. But don’t be alarmed, my dear sir. We shall make you all right again: a little care—’

‘I don’t want you to make me right again. I know what you mean by that. I am to be patched up; and I am to be careful how I ride, or walk, or run up-stairs; or perhaps I am never to do any one of those things, but to sit in my chair like a mummy in a museum, and be waited upon, and watched, and pitied, and condoled with. No, thank you, Didcott; life on such terms is not worth having. I’ll go my own way, and live as I have lived; and if I am doomed to drop down some day as my father dropped, in this room, nineteen years ago, let the doom come. Your tinkering won’t stave it off.’

‘I should like you to have another opinion. Will you go up to London and see—’

‘No; I have a shrewd idea what ails me, and I know it’s beyond cure. Can the cleverest man in London put a new heart into my body? Their scientific jargon would only worry me. No, Didcott, I shall ride my horse and look after my estate to the end, let it come soon or late. It doesn’t much matter. How did you happen to be here this morning?’

‘Your sister has been suffering from a relaxed throat; nothing serious, but she likes me to look after her. I was just coming from her morning-room. Very retiring person that new maid of hers. She always vanishes directly I appear.’

‘The widow?’ said Vyvyan. ‘Yes, she’s a decent woman enough. Goes quietly about the house, and keeps herself to herself.’

'Shall I come and see you to-morrow?'

'No. What's the use of our humbugging each other? If you were to send me medicine, I shouldn't take it. If you told me what to do, I shouldn't do it. Potter about the house, and molly-coddle my sister as much as you like. But the kindest thing you can do for me is to leave me alone.'

'You feel better now?'

'Much better.'

'That brandy revived you wonderfully, didn't it?'

'Wonderfully.'

'Then you'd better keep a bottle of brandy in your study, and take a little whenever you feel the attack coming on.'

'I shall do so. Don't say anything to my sister.'

'Of course not,' replied Didcott, reserving to himself the right to break his word.

He told Miss Penruth everything next day, and Miss Penruth allowed the facts of the case to ooze out gradually, and almost unawares, in the course of her conversation with the inestimable widow. Barbara was told nothing. It was her sister-in-law's particular desire that she should be kept in ignorance of her husband's peril.

'She is young and foolish, and is sure to do something silly,' said Priscilla. 'If she were to make a fuss about his health she would worry my poor brother, and it is our first duty to spare him all agitation.'

'That is essential,' replied Mr. Didcott.

More than a week passed without a recurrence of the attack; but this time Vyvyan entertained no hope that the malady was of a temporary kind. It would come upon him, no doubt, after an interval: that dull, slow beating of his heart—throbs that seemed as far apart as minute-guns—and the death-like faintness that followed. He lived in constant dread of this.

One day he rode further than usual, through a lonely shelterless country, and under a steady downpour. He came home late for dinner, wet to the skin, and with a desperate headache. Next day he felt dull and tired, and stayed at home by the fireside, where Barbara kept him company, and read yesterday's newspapers to him, and was, in all ways, as dutiful as a wife need be. Yet it was pain to him to watch the fair pale face, with its look of settled sadness, and to know that the utmost this young wife of his could give him was duty and obedience. She was more dutiful, more submissive, than a loving wife would have been. On the following day he was prostrate with some kind of low fever, and could no longer refuse to be visited by the family doctor. Didcott came, looked at his tongue, felt his pulse, and told him that he had caught a severe cold, a fact which the

patient himself knew perfectly well without the aid of science, since he could feel it in every bone of his body.

'Head's very hot,' said the surgeon, a fact also painfully palpable to the patient. 'I sha'n't trouble you with much medicine. A saline draught to be taken occasionally, that's all. But you'll want good nursing.'

Priscilla was sitting by the big gloomy four-post bedstead. She had taken possession of her brother in his illness, and would have turned Barbara out of the room if she had dared.

'Of course I shall nurse him!' exclaimed Miss Penruth.

'I think that is *my* duty,' said Barbara.

She was standing at the foot of the bed, pale, watchful, subdued.

'He had better have one of the servants to look after him at night,' said Didcott. 'Some one used to sick-nursing.'

'Then he can have nobody better than Morris,' replied Priscilla. 'She is admirable in a sick-room. I'm sure her attention to me when I had my throat in that dreadful state was beyond all praise; so gentle, so light-handed, so thoughtful. She is accustomed to sickness, poor thing, having nursed her husband in a lingering complaint.'

'Let me see her,' said Didcott, 'and tell her what she'll have to do. It is a question of giving nourishment frequently and at regular intervals.'

Priscilla went in search of her new favourite; and when Mr. Didcott left the sick-room presently, he found Mrs. Morris waiting for him in the dimly-lighted gallery, just outside Vyvyan's door.

To her he gave his instructions briefly. The patient was to have nourishment—of the light invalid kind—at intervals during the night. She was to sit up with him all night, and give him his medicine at regular hours. His wife and sister would be able to do all that was wanted in the day.

Mrs. Morris—who was that miracle, a silent woman—responded only by a respectful curtsy.

'You understand?' said the doctor.

'Yes, sir.'

The next day, and the next after that, there was little change. If it could be said hopefully that the patient was no worse, it could also be said despondently that he was no better.

'There has been no return of the heart-attack?' Didcott asked Vyvyan confidentially, bending down to whisper the question.

'None.'

'That is good at any rate. We shall have you down-stairs again in a few days. Was your sister's maid properly attentive to you, giving you your beef-tea and your medicine?'

‘Yes; she is a very pleasant person.’

Those were dull slow days, in which it seemed as if grim old Time were resting on the handle of his scythe instead of mowing down the hours. How different had the old man’s pace been in the sunny garden at Camberwell, where the light of foot went giddily round upon the springy turf to the sickly-sweet ‘Prima Donna,’ the languishing ‘Elfin;’ or in the homely little parlour, where two people played chess and conjugated Hindostanee verbs, and sketched the plan of a happy future. Then the longest summer day had been too short for such absolute content.

Barbara was constant in her attendance upon the invalid. She read to him, she sat and watched him while he dozed. She would not be ousted from her office by Priscilla, who also sat in the sick-room, and would not budge. When the invalid was asleep the two women sat in silence, listening to the ticking of his big hunting-watch, which dangled from its stand upon the table by his bed. The fire of wood and coal burned cheerily in the wide grate, and that was the only cheerful thing in the room.

On the third afternoon there came a remarkable change; not in the patient, but in the weather. A stormy wind swept up from the sea—a wind that bent the sturdiest of the oaks and firs as if they had been saplings, and tore up young plants in the shrubberies, and snapped the branches of beech and elm, and whirled autumn’s first fallen leaves in darkling gusts across the turf, and rattled the strong leaden casements.

The sky was of a livid angry hue, and now and then sharp showers of hail beat against the windows with a startling suddenness.

Vyvyan was asleep, and Barbara was standing by the window watching earth and sky when her maid Gilmore entered softly and beckoned to her.

She went out into the corridor.

‘If you please, ma’am,’ said Gilmore, ‘there is a gentleman in the drawing-room who has called to see you.’

‘On such a day. How extraordinary! I can’t leave my husband’s sick-room. You ought to know that, Gilmore. Did the gentleman give you his card?’

‘No, ma’am. But he wants particularly to see you, ma’am. He was so pressing that I didn’t like to refuse.’

‘Perhaps I had better come,’ said Barbara. ‘I daresay it is the new vicar at Rockport.’

She went back to Priscilla, told her of this curious summons, and then went down to the drawing-room.

CHAPTER XXVII.

'CAN I FORGET—CANST THOU FORGET?'

THE drawing-room at Place was not a bright or cheerful apartment at the best of times. It was long and low, hung with tapestry that had grown gray with age, the ceiling sustained by heavy beams, the furniture dark and bulky.

This afternoon, when the sky, unnaturally obscured by the storm, was darkening perceptibly with the approach of twilight, the room looked its gloomiest. The stranger stood with his face to one of the windows as Barbara entered, but he turned at the sound of her footfall, and came a few steps towards her, with his hat in his hand. His hair was long and unkempt, and fell over his forehead; his face was half-covered with a dark-brown beard; his skin was bronzed to a coppery darkness. He wore a heavy frieze overcoat, and a woollen scarf was muffled round his throat and ears.

He stood with his back to what little light there was in the darkening gray sky; he was roughly and strangely clad, changed by toil and hardship, wasted by sickness; yet, with one swift look of half-scared, half-joyous recognition, Barbara knew him.

'George!' she faltered, planting herself with her back against the door, as if she would so have guarded him from the approach of possible enemies. 'O, why did you come here? why—'

'Because I wanted to see you,' he answered. 'I would have come to you in a worse place. I would have gone where Orpheus went, and my Eurydice should not have slipped through my fingers. I would have done what the civilian Kavanagh did the other day at Lucknow, when he passed through the lines of the enemy, at the hazard of a horrible death. Why did I come here? Because I heard that, though you were rich, you were not happy, and I wanted to see for myself the best or the worst that could be said of you.'

'Who told you that I was unhappy?' she asked. She was trembling a little, yet she bore herself with an outward calmness which provoked her own wonder.

'Of what hard stuff women must be made!' she thought.

'Your father's clerk. I met him in Fleet-street the day before yesterday.'

'And he told you that I was unhappy?'

'Yes.'

'He is a traitor; false to my husband, false to me, false to you. Beware of him!'

'I am glad he deceived me when he told me you were miserable. That was false, was it not?'

'Of course it was false. Why should I be miserable? My husband is very good to me. He has been all kindness and

generosity ever since I married him. My life is not what you would call sunshiny, perhaps, except when my mother and sister are with me; but I get on smoothly enough, and I—am grateful to Providence. And now let us talk of yourself. How is it that you are back in England?’

‘I was sent home by the doctors. I was wounded at Lucknow, and was in the hospital there for three months. I have been as near death as a man can reasonably hope to be without dying. I have had a few miraculous escapes, and have done hard service in my humble capacity. I never thought to tread upon English soil again.’

She watched him intently as he spoke, and her pale cheek grew more pallid, and her eyes grew larger with horror. Even in that dim light she could see how sorely he was changed. He was the ghost of that George Leland she had known. The hollow cheeks, the deeply-sunken eyes, the premature lines that marked the sunburnt brow, all told of the wreck and ruin wrought by ten long months of such hardship and such privation as but rarely fall even to a soldier’s lot.

‘How ill you are looking!’ she faltered.

‘That is a fact I cannot deny. I lay in my berth like a log during the water part of my journey, and God only knows how they contrived to drag me through the overland portion of it. But here I am—come out alive from that hell upon earth in which so many nobler men went down. Poor Havelock! Ah, Barbara, *that* was a blow! A man forgets his little self, and little loves and sorrows, when he hears of such a calamity as that.’

‘You were with him?’ asked Barbara.

No; I was not at Lucknow till the storming of the city in March last. But every soldier in India felt the death of Havelock as a personal loss. He was a noble soul. Nicholson too, and Peel, and Gerrard, and Adrian Hope. The *Iliad* has not a longer list of heroes.’

‘And you have done heroic work,’ she said, looking up at him, forgetful of all that was perilous or compromising in her position, utterly unconscious of a pair of sharp feminine eyes which were watching her from the shrubbery opposite the window.

Mrs. Morris, refreshed by a comfortable midday sleep, had come down to the housekeeper’s room to make herself a cup of tea, and, hearing from Gilmore of Mrs. Penruth’s visitor, had tripped out to the garden to reconnoitre.

The firelight shone on those two figures as they stood a little way from the mullioned window, face to face.

‘I have done what I could,’ answered George Leland; ‘every man did that. There was not one who shirked danger or feared

death. The things that have been done yonder can never be undone; they will stand as a black spot upon the tablet of history for ever. But those infamies have been in some wise avenged. I have been called bloodthirsty, Barbara, because I ordered those Mahometan devils out of the cart and shot them dead, when I saw their rescue was inevitable if I did not. Bloodthirsty! God in Heaven! Do the men who say such things remember the blood of the little children that was shed in that accursed city, the shame of innocent women, the agony of wives—mothers?’

‘Come nearer the window and let me look at you,’ said Barbara tremulously; ‘there is so little light here. Yes, you are looking dreadfully ill. You ought to go home to your people and be nursed.’

‘That is what I am going to do. I am going home, by and by, to—be nursed.’

He paused before the last two words, as if there were some other thought in his mind.

‘Why did you not send me your name just now? There was no need of mystery. I have the right to see an old friend if I like.’

‘Unquestionably. That fellow Maulford gave me a false impression. I thought you were like a fairy princess in an ogre’s castle, and that I must come as a stranger in order to get a glimpse of you.’

‘It was a foolish fancy,’ said Barbara; ‘but it does not matter. We have seen each other. That is all you wanted, is it not? Indeed, I wonder that you should wish to see me again, after—’

‘After what?’ he asked, as she hesitated.

‘After having left my last letter unanswered.’

‘What letter? Good heavens! I leave a letter of yours unanswered! Did I not watch and hope for some reply from you—just one little line expressing pity or regret? I know I had no right to expect it, for I had done my best to make my renunciation irrevocable. Yet it would have comforted me to know you were sorry for me—that the bond between us was not broken without a mutual pang.’

She looked at him with widely-opened eyes.

‘Do you mean that you never received my letter?’ she asked; ‘my letter in which I told you that no change in fame or fortune could make any difference to me; that I would be true to you in evil days as well as good days; that nothing but the knowledge that you cared for somebody else would make me give you up? Do you mean to say that no such letter as that ever reached you?’

‘O Barbara, did you write that? Would you have faced

poverty and disgrace for my sake? How happy such a letter would have made me! But it never reached me.'

'Then I have been cruelly treated—cruelly! Fate has been too hard. I wrote to you on my sick-bed—yes, that ruthless letter of yours made me ill—and I gave the answer to my sister to post; and I waited and hoped for your reply. I thought you would relent, and all would be as it had been before that wretched summer night. And then, when no letter came, I thought you very, very cruel, and I tried to harden my heart against you.'

'And succeeded so well that in less than a year you were a rich man's wife,' said Leland, with a touch of bitterness. 'When I saw your marriage in the paper, I was weak enough to wonder a little that you were so easily consoled.'

'I married because my marriage would be advantageous to my mother, and it mattered little what I did with my life. You did not want me.'

'Did not want you? I was breaking my heart for you.'

'You should never have tried to cancel our engagement. That promise was sacred. How could you write me such a letter?'

'I was beside myself when I wrote—mad, with overwork and bitter disappointment. I was a broken man—ruined, disgraced—and I considered it my duty to set you free from any association with a man upon whom his fellow-men looked coldly.'

'Do you think the evidence of all the world would have made me doubt you? Well, you chose that it should be so, and Fate made your choice irrevocable. Let us talk no more about it. You have only to think of getting well. But how are you to get back to Launceston in this frightful weather? Your coat is wet,' laying her hand lightly on his sleeve; 'yes, dreadfully wet. You walked here through those hail-storms?'

'Yes, I walked. It was my own choice. I might have hired a fly at Launceston.'

'You must not walk back. You must get your coat dried, and then you must have my carriage to take you back.'

'Would not that set people talking?'

'No doubt it would. But I must endure that.'

'No, Barbara. I can go back to the lodge between the showers, and wait there for the coach. There is one that passes at seven. I made inquiries before I left Launceston. Give yourself no trouble about me. Go back to your husband.'

'Yes, I must go back to him. He is ill, and I have no right to be away from him.'

'I will not detain you any longer. It is something to have seen you, and to know that you are not unhappy. You are changed, but not for the worse. You look older and graver,

but no less beautiful than in the days that are gone. Good-bye, Barbara.'

'You must not go away in that wet coat, and without some kind of refreshment,' said Barbara, going to the door.

She opened it, and called Gilmore, who came quickly enough to betoken a certain alertness in the household.

'Get this gentleman's coat dried by the kitchen fire, and bring him some wine,' she said.

Major Leland took off the old frieze coat and the big muffler, and appeared in his own natural garb, like the George Leland of old. Gilmore carried off the coat, and reappeared quickly with the inevitable twin decanters of port and sherry on the big silver tray. Then she laid a cloth on a table near the fire, and brought a round of corned beef and a newly-cut chine, with the necessary adjuncts, this substantial fare being considered in hospitable Cornwall a kind of light refreshment.

The Major had no appetite for beef or chine ; but to please Barbara he drank a glass of old-fashioned brown sherry, of a fine gouty flavour, and ate a crust of home-baked bread.

'Strange that I should eat your husband's bread and salt,' he said.

'Why should it be strange?' asked Barbara, looking at him with frank honest eyes, full of such tenderness as the truest wife in the land may feel for a hero. 'Can we not be friends? We have never quarrelled or ceased to esteem each other. Fate has parted us, and we must bow to God's will. We must be friends at a distance perhaps, for my husband is a man who lives almost alone ; but we can be friends to the end of life, I hope—Major Leland.'

How difficult it was for her lips to shape this formal name, remembering their parting on board the *Hesper*, when she had been clasped to his heart with all the force of passionate grief, and had felt that true heart beating against her own ! The memory of that fond farewell brought the blood to cheek and brow, and then left her pale as with sudden pain.

'I must go,' she said abruptly. 'My husband may have awakened, and will think me unkind for having left him. Good-bye, God bless you ! You will go back to Somersetshire at once, will you not, and rest, and recover your health ?'

'I shall go back to my native village, no doubt, sooner or later ; but my father died a year and a half ago, and the old vicarage belongs to a stranger. There is only Marian left in the place where we were born. This mixture of sea and moorland air will set me up, I think, better than Somersetshire. I shall stay at Launceston, or perhaps Rockport, for a few days.'

Rockport was a fishing village and harbour in a hollow of the cliffs, within a few miles of Place, nearer even than Camelot.

'Would you not be better cared for with one of your sisters?'

'I need no special care. I only want rest and English air. Good-bye, Barbara. You may call me Major Leland, if you like. I suppose it is only right that the mistress of this house should do so. But I shall call you Barbara to my dying day.'

'I don't think it makes much difference,' answered Barbara naïvely.

No, Fate is too big to be influenced by such details. I see you are anxious to go back to your husband.'

'Yes, I should like to be with him when he wakes. Good-bye.'

'Good-bye. Am I forbidden to come and see you again?'

'You are the best judge of that. You had better not come again while my husband is ill; for if you are to visit here I must introduce you to him. He is not fond of strangers.'

'That does not promise a hearty welcome. Well, perhaps it would be wiser for me not to come. And yet to go back to India only having once seen your face! That seems hard.'

'Good-bye,' she said, holding out her hand to him. 'I am sure it is better for you not to come. My husband is all goodness to me; but he is rough and stern in his manner. He might unintentionally affront you.'

'Or intentionally. Well, doubtless you are right, Barbara. Once my Barbara, my very own! And I let you go—fool, fool, fool!'

He held her hand, and drew a little nearer to her—near enough to lay his left hand on her broad calm forehead, looking into the sweet sad face, as if he were trying to read the secrets which were masked by that calm outlook.

'What a lovely piece of marble you are! How self-possessed!' he muttered. 'And you know nothing of the battle I am fighting. Well, it is natural. You belong to the calmer higher regions, where all perfect things dwell apart: I to that lower struggling mass of humanity which sins and suffers.'

He led her to the door; and so they parted, with a show of tranquillity to the last—yes, even to the last instant of parting. But five minutes later Barbara was on her knees beside the sofa in her dressing-room, sobbing out the agony of her wounded heart.

Her letter, the letter breathing faithfulness, unselfish devotion, recklessness of all that life could bring, save himself and his love, that letter on which hung the fate of two lives, had been flung to the winds, and he had been left to think her cold and base, heartless and mercenary. What must he have thought of her, when he read of her marriage with a rich man?

'O Flossie, is it your fault that my life has been spoiled?'

she thought, remembering that it was to her sister's hands she had confided the letter.

Gilmore wondered and held her tongue, being faithful to her mistress; but the widow Morris told Priscilla how Mrs. Penruth had stood by the drawing-room window in close and earnest conversation with a tall sunburnt stranger; how they had clasped hands, lingering as if loth to part; and how the stranger had laid his hand upon Mrs. Penruth's brow, and looked at her as a brother—or a lover—might have done.

Mrs. Morris had not been able to hear their conversation, seeing that the wind was howling boisterously all the time, and the lattice was shut.

'Not that I should have thought it any shame to listen,' said the widow, with a virtuous air; 'for when I have once attached myself to a lady I would go through fire and water to serve her. And I thought it my duty to acquaint you with what I happened to see. I did not go out of my way to watch them, you see, miss; but I was just stepping out to call Mr. Mark's dog, and I happened to see Mrs. Penruth and the gentleman standing in front of the window, so wrapped up in each other that I believe a regiment of soldiers might have gone by without either of them taking notice.'

Priscilla shuddered. She had always expected to have to shudder sooner or later about her sister-in-law, so the shuddering hardly came upon her as a surprise.

'Did they kiss each other, Morris?' she gasped presently.

'No, miss; things didn't go quite so far as that. I think if it had come to kissing I must have gone away. But there are looks that mean as much as kisses; looks which no prudent young woman would expose herself to.'

'What is to be expected from a girl so brought up? Her mother and father living apart; no religious bias on either side, a careless irreverent way of looking at serious subjects. My poor brother is lying on his sick-bed, and his wife takes that opportunity for a clandestine interview with a former lover; for I suppose, Morris, after what you saw, there can be no doubt the man was a lover.'

'He was too affectionate for a relation, miss; and I think I've heard you say that Mrs. Penruth has no near relations.'

'None that she has ever associated with.'

'This gentleman is tall and dark; he looks like a foreigner, or a man who has lived abroad—in India, perhaps.'

'I believe I know who he is,' sighed Priscilla. 'It is very bad, Morris. I don't think anything could be worse. If he had approached the house openly, I should have considered his visit a piece of audacious insolence; but to come in this underhand manner—'

Here Barbara entered the sitting-room, where Miss Penruth was sipping her tea before a comfortable fire, attended by the widow, while Vyvyan slumbered in the adjoining bedchamber. The wife had dried her tears and calmed herself, and had been sitting quietly by her husband's bed.

'You have had a visitor, I hear,' said Priscilla.

'Yes.'

'Some ancient pensioner on your mother's bounty?'

'My mother had no pensioners. She was not rich enough to help other people, except in very small ways. My visitor was a gentleman we were intimate with some years ago—Major Leland. I think you must have heard of him. He distinguished himself lately in India.'

'Yes, I think I have heard of him.'

'I should like to have introduced him to Vyvyan, if he had come at a happier time.'

'I doubt if the introduction would have been particularly gratifying to my brother; he has not that admiration for the bloodthirsty character of a soldier which is common to sentimental schoolgirls and the Conservative papers,' answered Priscilla acrimoniously.

She was intensely disappointed at Barbara's frankness, as it would have better suited her temper to convict her sister-in-law of profound dissimulation.

Later that evening, when the house-servants were sitting over their comfortable supper in the kitchen, with closed doors, and a general determination to let their masters and mistresses shift for themselves, Mrs. Morris walked up and down the hall, with velvet footfall, waiting for some one.

The some one was Mark, who came in from the back premises presently.

He looked round him cautiously in the dim light before committing himself, and then went up to the respectable Morris and gave her a hearty kiss.

'Well, little woman, how goes it?' he asked.

'Tell me about the boys first. You went over to see them?'

'Yes; it's a precious long way, and it was a precious cold journey, to say nothing of being nearly blinded with hail half the time.'

'You might have gone inside the coach, Mark.'

'Catch me putting myself in a packing-case smelling of mouldy straw, and crammed with old women and babies! No, Molly; I like a mouthful of fresh air, and to smoke my cigar in peace and quiet.'

'And how are the boys?'

'Well and hearty, God bless them; not learning much, I fancy, for they seem to like their school. The schoolmistress

is a decent kind of person, and all the pupils look well fed. I don't think our young barbarians could be better off.'

'I'm very glad to hear that. Thank you for going, Mark. I shall feel ever so much easier in my mind now.'

Even Medea cared for her children, though she had an odd way of showing it; and no doubt Lady Macbeth was as affectionate a mother as she was an exemplary wife.

'How's Vyvyan?' asked Mark.

'Pretty much the same; but there's not much amiss with him. He'll be all right in a few days.'

'I hope so, poor old chap,' said Mark, with honest heartiness.

He had often vaguely contemplated his brother's death as the necessary prelude to that millennium during which he was to reign at Place; but when it came to the actual prospect of such an event, that sediment of goodness at the bottom of his soul was jerked suddenly to the top.

'And now I say, Molly,' he continued, while she was helping him off with his coat, 'how long is this blessed masquerading of yours to go on, and what is to come of it when it's all over? Will you be any nearer being acknowledged as my wife by my brother and sister because you have lowered yourself to act as their servant?'

'You leave it all to me,' said Molly, with tightened lips. 'I have got round your sister already, and I shall get round your brother before I've done with him.'

'But you've been in the house six months, and see how little good has come of it. You're no nearer your end than you were last March.'

Molly looked at him intently, but said nothing.

'And look what a false position it is for me. People would think me a hound if they knew it.'

'Nobody will think you a hound when you are master of this house, and when that fine young lady yonder is out of it.'

'Yes; but that's talking of what may never come to pass, what I don't even wish to come to pass. When all is said and done, Vyvyan has been a good brother to me; and now—now that business is going easier at the quarries—I feel a happier man than I used to be, and I can afford to wish him a long life.'

'So can I, when he has acknowledged me as his sister-in-law, and given my children their rights,' answered Molly.

'Do you think you'll ever bring him to that?'

'I do.'

CHAPTER XXVIII.

‘HE WILL NOT LIVE TO BE AN OLD MAN.’

THE cottage on the road from Camelot to St. Columb was shut up, and Aunt Jooly had the key. It was her privilege to look in occasionally and air the rooms, and see that the furniture which Mrs. Peters so highly valued suffered no damage by moths or mildew, dust or vermin. People at Camelot expressed some natural wonder at this change in the state of affairs, and the popular opinion was that the lady had indulged too freely in ‘her tempers,’ and that Mark had plucked up a spirit and had broken the bonds that held him. Everybody knew where the three boys had gone. Had they not been seen to depart with bag and baggage—otherwise a large deal box and a small hamper—on the roof of the St. Columb coach, early in the month of March, in the care of the guard, who was accessible to the offer of cider, and not unwilling to say where he had deposited his young charges? But no one knew precisely where Mrs. Peters had betaken herself, though there was much speculative gossip floating, and several Camelot people had cousins who had seen or heard of the lady in London. One story went so far as to say that she had taken to the stage, and had been seen on the boards of a London theatre, singing and dancing to the admiration of the assembled multitude. There was a general idea that a young woman from Camelot, possessed of good looks and intelligence, might achieve immediate distinction in London, and succeed in any walk of life to which her fancy led her, having nothing to fear from the rivalry of metropolitan millions.

The cottage being abandoned, there was now nothing save inclination to draw Mark to Camelot; and his visits to that interesting town had become few and far between. Yet he loved the place, and was never happier or more at his ease than in the stuffy billiard-room at the King’s Arms.

On the evening after his journey to St. Columb he rode into the narrow street between six and seven o’clock, and put up his horse in the old stable.

‘I am only going to stop an hour or so, Thomas,’ he told the ostler; and then he strolled round to the front of the house, where Didcott and Nichols were enjoying the sunset, and the prospect afforded by the steep slope of the stony High-street, shut in by the town-hall and market-place at the bottom of the hill.

His friends had been talking earnestly as he approached, but they stopped suddenly at sight of him, and the doctor began to whistle an old song dreamily, as if his thoughts were far away, while Nichols greeted the new arrival with unusual animation;

whereby it occurred to Mark that their conversation had been about him.

'What a stranger you are, old fellow!' said the veterinary surgeon.

'I've been extra busy for the last few months.'

'And you haven't much inducement to ride this way now, eh? Well, never mind that. How's the Squire?'

'You had better ask Didcott. He knows more than I do.'

'Didcott never talks of a patient. Now if I have a curious case in my line, I go talking of it everywhere.'

'I don't think there's much amiss with my brother bodily,' said Mark; 'a heavy cold and a little low fever. That's all, isn't it, Didcott?'

'That's about all there is in his present illness,' answered the surgeon.

'His present illness!' echoed Mark; 'why, he never was laid up before, within my memory! He's as strong as a horse; or I should say as strong as a horse ought to be; for my experience of horses is that they are the weakest things in creation.'

'Yes, he has great vigour—a fine sinewy frame. But I fancy he has been a little out of sorts for the last month or so, has he not, Mark?'

'He has been dull, certainly—gloomy and out of spirits; but I did not put that down to his health.'

'What else can disturb him?'

'Well, I don't know. I doubt if he is altogether comfortable in his mind about that young wife of his. She is very sweet, and behaves uncommonly well; but I don't believe she's happy, and I think Vyvyan sees that she isn't, and perhaps that preys upon him. It's like having a bird in a cage, you see. The fonder you are of the bird, the harder it must hurt you if you see the poor thing beating its breast against the wires and pining to be free.'

'I can't cut it so fine as that, Mark,' said the matter-of-fact family practitioner, who had been ground so hard against the actualities of life that the keen edge of his feelings had been somewhat blunted. 'Your sister-in-law has got a splendid home and a fine position in the county, and she ought to be grateful to the man to whom she owes them. It's all bosh to talk about a woman being unhappy under such circumstances. My wife may be unhappy when all the children want boots, and there isn't a shot in the locker; but for a woman who—Bah! Mrs. Penruth had better make much of her husband and her home while she has them. She won't have either of them for ever, perhaps.'

The three men were standing quite alone in front of the inn-door; no one within hearing; the sharp click of the balls

sounding now and then from the open window of the billiard-room.

There was a significance in the doctor's speech which struck Mark—the 'I could an' if I would' tone which is always unmistakable in a man who possesses somebody else's secret, and only asks to be tempted to betray it.

'Do you mean to say that my brother is not a long-lived man?' asked Mark.

'Your father was not a long-lived man.'

'My father died of heart-disease. I have just as much need to be frightened at that as Vyvyan has.'

'O, you're sound enough!' interjected Nichols. 'I'd warrant you any day.'

'My brother looks every way sounder, and is better built for strength and speed than I am,' answered Mark, watching Didcott's face, which had assumed a Sphinx-like impenetrability.

'Come and smoke a cigar with me, old fellow,' said the doctor, hooking his arm through Mark's. 'We'll join you in the billiard-room presently, Nichols. You can ask Marston to let us have our revenge for that licking he gave us the last time Penruth was here.'

'All right,' answered Nichols, who saw that confidences were about to be exchanged.

Didcott and Mark walked up the hill, away from the market-place and its distractions, which at this evening hour generally took the shape of a vagabond pig or an adventurous Cochinchina hen and chickens. Mark gave his friend a cigar and lighted one for himself, while they strolled for a little way in silence, and then Didcott spoke.

'I don't want to alarm you unduly, Mark,' he began, 'but I believe that, sooner or later, your brother will go off just as your poor father did.'

Mark's heart gave a sudden leap, as if it also had gone wrong. Was it sorrow, surprise, pleasure, that so stirred and shook within him? He could not tell. For the moment he only knew that he was startled.

'What ground have you for saying that?'

'The best possible ground. I have used the stethoscope, and I know the extent of the mischief. I should have liked your brother to have had a second opinion, but he will not consent to see any one. He told me to say nothing to your sister or you; but I feel that you ought to know the truth. It will make you more considerate, more thoughtful, with your brother.'

'Of course, of course,' assented Mark. 'Poor Vyvyan! And I thought that he had such a powerful constitution. Sooner or later, you say, this complaint must kill him. Do you mean that

he may live to be an old man, and go off suddenly at the end of a long life ?

‘Hardly. I have heard of such cases, but they are rare. Your brother’s attack was sharp—very sharp—and I fancy he has had such attacks frequently of late. I am afraid that the end cannot be very far off. It might be a question of months, a year or two perhaps, but he will not live to be an old man.’

‘Poor Vyvyan !’

‘Yes, poor fellow, rather hard upon him, isn’t it ? I hope he won’t leave the estate to that young wife of his, a stranger in the county.’

‘I don’t think he will. He has provided for her handsomely by a marriage settlement. She has a life-interest in the Hall-worthy estate.’

‘Quite enough too. Very handsome of your brother. Well, Mark, I suppose there will be grand doings at Place when you are master ?’

‘I shall keep a good stud of hunters and twelve couple of harriers—you may be sure of that. People shall not have to go fifteen miles for a day’s sport. But, God knows, I’ve no desire to shorten Vyvyan’s life. I wish there was nothing the matter with him, poor fellow.’

Mark said this in all honesty ; yet when he was riding across the moor that night, he could not keep his imagination from forecasting the day when his brother’s estate should be his. Fancy overleaped all the gloomy details of death and burial. Vyvyan’s figure disappeared from the picture, as if the very ground had opened and swallowed him up alive, and Mark saw himself lord of the good old house, the capacious stables. He planned everything—the quality of his hunters, the men he would have for huntsman and feeder, the pedigree of his hounds.

It was late when he came within sight of the lighted windows of Place, and fell down, like Alnaschar, from the altitude to which imagination had carried him, and remembered who and where he was. The lamp burned dimly in his brother’s room, dimly in the hall. The rest of the windows were dark. He went into the stable-yard, gave his horse to the sleepy helper, who was on the watch for him, and then went in at the back-door. It was an unusual thing for him to abandon his horse thus carelessly to hireling hands, and the helper was the lowest drudge in the stable ; but to-night Mark’s mind was big with weighty thoughts. He could not stop to see that his favourite Pepper was properly bedded down.

Molly, otherwise Mrs. Morris, was in the sick-room. Mark knew pretty well where to find her at this hour. Every one else would have gone to bed, and her office of night-watcher

would have begun. During her husband's illness, Mrs. Penruth had occupied a bedroom on the other side of her dressing-room. It was near enough to the invalid's room for her to be within call.

Mark opened the door softly and peeped in. The nurse was sitting by the fire musing, with her arms folded, and her feet on the fender. The curtains of the big four-post bed were drawn on the side nearest the light.

'Asleep?' whispered Mark, with a glance towards the bed.

Mrs. Morris nodded 'yes;' whereupon Mark beckoned, and she followed him out into the corridor.

A lamp was burning near, and the dim light showed Mark's pale and agitated countenance.

'What is the matter?' asked Molly eagerly. 'Has anything happened?'

'Yes, I have heard something; something awful,' he answered, looking cautiously up and down the corridor. 'Are they all in bed?'

'An hour ago. What is it, Mark? What have you heard?' asked the woman breathlessly.

'I have heard something from Didcott—about my brother,' said Mark, grasping her by the arm.

It was Molly's face that paled now; her lips trembled momentarily, and then grew calm.

'What has *he* got to say?' she asked, in her hard matter-of-fact tone.

'He does not think that Vyvyan can live many years—perhaps not many months. He has my father's complaint, heart-disease. Didcott has found it out. He is doomed, poor fellow. And you will have your wish, Molly, sooner than you or I could ever have hoped. We shall be master and mistress here, little woman, unless Vyvyan should make a will in his wife's favour.'

'Not much chance of that while I am here.'

'What could you do to prevent it?'

'A good deal. I know things that would turn your brother against his wife, and rightly too; and if it was needful I should tell him what I know. Whatever chance she had a month ago has gone now.'

'Why so?'

'Because your brother wouldn't care to leave this place to his wife's Indian lover; and if he left it to her it would come to that. What do you say to the gentleman being in Cornwall—close by—at Rockport? Do you suppose your brother would like to know that?'

'The man has a right to be in Cornwall if he chooses,' answered Mark. 'There is no treason in that.'

'Isn't there? Do you suppose that he has any motive for

coming to Cornwall except the hope of seeing her? He has seen her once; and no doubt he will see her again. But never mind that. Make your mind easy about your brother's will. That shall be all right. Tell me everything Didcott said. How long has he known about this complaint of your brother's?

'Only within the last month. He may have suspected it before, because, you see, my father died in the same way.'

'Yes, yes; I understand. Heart-disease? And he may go off any day, suddenly?'

'I'm afraid so. And I say, Molly, if he does, and if your time for being mistress here should come soon, don't you think you'll find yourself in a very awkward position? You will be recognised by everybody here as the woman who crept into the house disguised as a servant.'

'I shall manage matters somehow, Mark. I have kept myself so close—I never talk to any one but your sister—that no one would know me if I were to take off my cap and alter my hair. You hardly knew me that night at the cottage.'

'Well, I must confess you've made an uncommon guy of yourself; but still—'

'We are not obliged to begin life at Place immediately. We can go to London for a year or so, and get rid of all the old servants while we are away.'

'Get rid of the servants! Why, I shouldn't know myself amongst a lot of strange faces!'

'That's because you are so narrow-minded, Mark,' answered Molly contemptuously. 'But don't you bother your poor brains about me; I shall brazen things out, you may depend upon it.'

'You're such a clever woman, it would be difficult for any one to put you in a hole,' said Mark; 'but I can't say I like the way we are going on just now.'

'Isn't it something gained to have got the blind side of your sister?'

'My sister hasn't any blind side, Molly. She likes you as a servant; but she would turn against you to-morrow if she knew the truth.'

'Let her turn; turn and turn out at the same time. When you are once owner of Place we can do without her.'

'I don't feel very eager for that day,' said Mark, forgetting his castle-building of half an hour ago. 'I can't bring myself to wish my brother in his grave.'

'No, nor to wish your wife righted. You have no more feeling than a jelly-fish. Good-night.'

Mrs. Morris emphasised this leave-taking with an indignant flounce of her petticoats, and went back to her duty in the sick-room.

CHAPTER XXIX.

SOONER OR LATER.

THE cold and fever passed away, cured by rest, warmth, and demulcent diet, or by Mr. Didcott's saline draughts and daily scrutiny of the patient's tongue. Vyvyan was able to get about again, and Mrs. Morris was released from her night-watching. But the master of Place was not the man he had been before his illness. Everybody in the household saw the change in him, and each commented upon it after his or her fashion.

It was not forgotten in that household how Vyvyan's father had fallen down dead in the little study one winter evening, after playing the host at an audit dinner, and riding fifteen miles through rain and wind, a stalwart hearty-looking man in the prime of life. In his case there had been no warning—hale and vigorous to-day, and measured for his coffin to-morrow; but in his son's face the old servants fancied they saw a prophetic look, the forecast of doom.

The master's horses stood idle in their stalls, or were exercised, when arrived at a stage of dangerous ferocity, by a groom: but Vyvyan went no more upon his accustomed round of inspection. Plough and harrow went over the naked hills, but he was not by to see. He sat by the fire in his study, idly skimming yesterday's papers, and waiting for his sentence to be fulfilled. He had made up his mind that he was shortly to die, and life had lost all zest for him. He felt only the agony of regret at parting with the land he had loved so well and cared for so sedulously—the farms and the manors, whose catalogue was graven on his heart. The keenest sting of death was in the surrender of these—of these and of the wife who had never loved him.

He had suffered from an occasional return of the heart-attack, sometimes in a stronger, sometimes in a weaker, form; but let it come when it would, after a short interval or a long one, the character of the seizure was always the same—the same deathlike faintness, the same dull action of the labouring heart. The nature of the malady was unmistakable.

'My father had no such warning,' Vyvyan said to himself; 'I ought to consider myself favoured. Yet I think if I were going to be blown from the muzzle of a gun, I would rather stand with my back to it and let the explosion come unawares, than enjoy the privilege of looking into the cannon's mouth for a week or two before my flesh and bones were scattered into space.'

Not only were these attacks painful and exhausting when they came. The effect upon his spirits and his nerves was worse than the bodily evil. The physical ailment passed away, and left him, to all appearance, no worse a man than before it came;

but the mental suffering was lasting. Vyvyan lived in hourly dread of an attack, and at every severer seizure he told himself, 'This is the end.' Recovery brought no sense of relief. It was like being dragged out of a river by the hair of his head, only to be flung in again half an hour afterwards. Better to have been drowned, and to have made an end of it, since the end must come sooner or later.

Sooner or later—that was the tune to which his life was set in these dark autumnal days. The old clock in the hall ticked 'sooner or later.' The same words sounded in the falling of the ashes on the hearth, in the sighing of the wind among the trees. Sooner or later!

'I had better make my will,' he said to himself one morning. 'It must be done, sooner or later. I've been an orderly man all my life, and I don't want to die with my affairs in confusion.'

He sent for Marston, the Camelot solicitor, who attended to much of his local business, and the two were closeted together for a long morning. The will was just, and not ungenerous. It gave the land to Mark, in the event of the testator dying without children. It gave the quarries to Priscilla, who was well off without them. It gave annuities to some old servants, legacies to others, large sums to county charities, mementoes of more or less value to a few old friends. To his wife the Squire bequeathed his mother's jewels—which reposed comfortably in the Launceston bank, and had not been seen by mortal eyes for the last twenty years—in token of his affection; and he renounced for his heirs, executors, and assigns all power of appointment over the reversionary interest in the Hallworthy estate.

He knew that Major Leland had been at Place, that he was still in the neighbourhood, and might be seen from time to time riding a thick-set hunter over the moor, and riding like a man who held his life at a pin's fee. Priscilla had taken care to acquaint her brother with his rival's visit; but she had not expatiated upon the meeting between Barbara and her former lover. It was enough that Vyvyan should know they had met.

'And will meet again, no doubt,' he told himself. 'Why should I be angry or wretched because he is near? Can I part them for ever, for a year even? I shall be in my grave, and they will be happy together, before the world is a year older. I know that she will behave with womanly dignity, and will respect the name I have given her. She will not marry in undue haste. She will not expose herself to scandal before marriage. She will do her duty to me dead, as she has done her duty to me living.'

When he had made his will he tried to resign himself, or at the least to accustom himself, to the idea that Mark would soon be master of the land, and sitting in his place. Mark had been

very steady of late. He spent his evenings in the gloomy old house, sitting by the hearth, with his famous lemon-and-white spaniel, which was supposed to be a most perfect thing in spaniels, lying at his feet. He made feeble efforts to read the London papers, after devouring the local journals; but the drama of London life, political and social, was to him as far off and as uninteresting as might have been a tragedy enacted in the planet Neptune. Mark's mind was essentially local. He could not push his ideas across the boundary-line of his daily life, the figures which had made the sum of his existence from boyhood—his own and his neighbours' horses, his own and his neighbours' dogs. If he tried to picture to himself a foreign racecourse, he fancied the horses of a different kind from those that ran at home—half zebra, or with a touch of the camel. The continent of Europe was to his mind a nebulous world. His only idea of strange lands was that they contained nothing natural or civilised, and could offer no form of life worth living.

The long autumn evenings at Place hung heavily upon the whole family. Vyvyan sat brooding by the fire; Barbara sitting near him, ready to talk if he pleased, silent when he was silent. Priscilla travelled slowly along the endless paths of a Penelope's web, in the shape of a wool-work border of roses and lilies for a set of window-curtains, in which every flower was the labour of a week. Mark longed exceedingly for some one who would play cribbage with him; or for a family circle sociable enough for all-fours; or for a billiard-table; and having none of these amusements, pulled the spaniel's ears and yawned behind his limp local paper.

And all this time George Leland was sitting in the comfortable parlour at the Waterloo Inn, Rockport, whence the last of the tourists had departed, and where he had the house to himself. He stayed, though he knew that it was idle and foolish in him to stay there. He cherished no evil design, he nursed no wicked hope; but life, blighted and maimed though it was, tasted sweeter to him while he was near Barbara.

CHAPTER XXX.

'IT IS THE COMMON LOT.'

HAVING hardened himself to the making of his will, Vyvyan found it easier to bear the thought of that time when another should reign in his place. The idea could never become pleasant to him, for he fondly loved the possessions which he had to surrender. He felt like some ardent spinster who looks over

the accumulated treasures of years, daintily put away in some perfumed receptacle—the old lace, the odd pieces of silk and satin, the ribbons of a bygone fashion—and tries to determine which of all these she can best bear to give away ; and in the end shuts the lid of her treasure-chest, and leaves all her belongings inside. She may never again array herself in these fineries ; but it is a joy to possess them. So with Vyvyan : the idea of letting go the wealth which he had used so little gnawed like a vulture at his heart. Yet at the worst he was a man, and could school himself to play a manly part.

He called Mark into his study one morning in October, about a fortnight after that revelation of Mr. Didcott's, and motioned him to the chair on the opposite side of the hearth.

'I want a little serious talk with you,' he said.

Mark winced. Affairs were straight at the quarries now, thanks to Mr. Maulford's skilful sliding over of all past difficulties. Mark had been dealing honestly with his brother's money ever since that auditing of his accounts, and meant to keep the straight path in future. After all it was much easier going than the crooked road upon which he had so nearly travelled to destruction.

But if his business affairs were in a comfortable condition his domestic situation was embarrassing, and Mark's heart sank within him at sight of his brother's gloomy face.

'I want to talk about the future—your future, Mark,' pursued Vyvyan.

'Don't worry yourself about that,' faltered Mark.

'But I must worry myself. I must face the inevitable. My father had no warning of his end. He had no time in which to regulate his affairs, and to plan the work that was to be done on the land when he should be no longer by to superintend the doing of it. I am more fortunate.' His lip curled with a grim smile. 'I have reason to believe that there is something organically wrong here,' touching his heart, 'and that I may some day die suddenly, as my father died. It may be long before that day comes. Sufferers from heart-disease have lived to extreme old age. But it is well to be prepared for the worst.'

'Dear old fellow, may you live to the close of the century !' said Mark, stretching out his hand, which Vyvyan grasped in silent cordiality.

'Thank you, Mark,' he answered quietly. 'I know you wish me well ; but we must be prepared. There was a time when I felt curiously sensitive upon this subject. I could not bear that either you or Priscilla should know. I told Didcott to keep the matter a secret. But since I have made my will, and settled everything, I can bear to look the future in the face. We must all die, Mark. It is the common lot.'

'Yes,' sighed Mark, who felt as if it were a common lot which could not fall to him for the next fifty years or so.

'I have made my will.'

'Indeed!' said Mark, with a gasp.

He felt that his features were slightly agitated, in spite of his endeavour to compose them. The muscles about his mouth refused to be steady.

'Yes; I have done what I believe is right,' pursued Vyvyan; and then he sat silently staring at the fire, while Mark's heart beat furiously, and his breath grew short.

'I have left you the whole of the land, except Hallworthy.'

'O Vyvyan,' cried Mark, 'what a princely gift!'

He leant forward and grasped his brother's hands, and bent his face over them, and Vyvyan felt Mark's tears falling on him in large drops like a summer shower. The sudden revelation had stirred all that was kindly and warm in the younger brother's weak soul.

'How good you are to me!' he exclaimed, controlling these mingled emotions of joy and gratitude and brotherly love. 'I don't deserve so much.'

'Don't talk about desert. The land was our father's. I have added a great deal; but that was done for my own pleasure. You are the natural heir. To whom else should I leave it? To my wife, who would raise up the children of a stranger to inherit the soil? No, Mark. It is much to me to know that the old name will be associated with the old place; that the old coat of arms on the ceilings will belong to those who inhabit the house. You must marry, Mark; the sooner the better.'

Mark bent his head again, this time to hide the flood of crimson that dyed his face.

'You must make a marriage worthy of my heir,' continued Vyvyan. 'You have been much steadier of late, I know. I hope you have shaken yourself free from all discreditable associations—from all, Mark. I have never pried into your life; but I have heard things said about you. People will talk, even to a man who is as little of a gossip as I am. I hope that connection at Camelot is all over and done with, Mark.'

What could Mark say? These are the moments of life when a weak soul takes refuge in prevarication.

'Yes,' answered Mark, 'there is no one I care for at Camelot now.'

'I am glad of that. Have you ever thought of marrying?'

'Not of late years.'

'We live such a lonely life here—my fault, I know. I hate strange faces. But you must look about you, Mark. There is my wife's sister, now, a bright lively girl. You seemed to take to her, and she to you. She might make you a nice wife.'

Mark breathed a heartrending sigh. He could but think of what a man's life might be with such a companion as Flossie, and of what it was with such a wife as Molly.

'No,' he said hastily, 'it's no good thinking of that. She's a nice girl, but she doesn't care a straw about me.'

'She might be made to care for you,' urged his brother. 'She has never had a lover.'

'No, Vyvyan; don't talk about it, please. You pain me.'

'I understand,' said Vyvyan, who concluded that Mark had made Flossie an offer, and had been rejected. 'Well, you will find some one soon, I hope. I should like to see you married before I go.'

Mark gave his brother's hand another squeeze, but said nothing.

'If I dared tell him!' he thought; 'but, mild as he seems just at this moment, he would disinherit me in a trice if he knew how I stood with poor Molly.'

'Give me the map of the estate out of that drawer, Mark, and let us go over it together,' said Vyvyan.

Mark found the map in the bottom drawer of an old-fashioned brass-handled bureau. It was on a six-inch scale, and presented a noble appearance when spread out upon the owner's desk; a vast area of fields and pastures, wood and coppice, painted a delicate pink, with intervening patches and intervals of blue which denoted lands belonging to foreign powers. To Vyvyan it was the chart of the world. He cared for nothing outside it. Mountains and rivers and oceans, the mighty monuments of the past, the splendours of the present, were to him as nothing, set against the soil he had inherited from his father, and had increased by thrift and carefulness. The wonders of earth might interest others; he cared only for the things that were his own.

He and Mark sat gloating over the map, discussing the merit of various tenants, the value of each particular farm, for nearly two hours, Vyvyan advising upon the minutest details of management with an exact knowledge of every acre. At last he rolled up the map, and confessed himself tired.

'I miss my long rides over the moor,' he said; 'but I think perhaps it's better to avoid violent exertion.'

In spite of his abhorrence of doctors and regimen, he had unconsciously formed new rules for his life. His dread of those horrible attacks made him cautious. He remembered that one seizure had occurred after a hard ride, and on this account he had given up riding. The want of open-air exercise, to which he had been accustomed all his life, increased the depression of his spirits, till he had neither inclination nor energy to leave the fireside. His wife saw the alteration in his health and habits

and advised him to try change of air and scene ; but he put her anxieties lightly aside.

'My dear, there is nothing the matter with me,' he said ; 'I am well enough.'

'You never ride or drive now,' she said.

'No, I am more comfortable at home.'

And then he found himself wondering whether she wanted him out of the way ; whether, if he were absent all the day through, as he had been so often of old, her lover would find some means of seeing her—her first, fond, nnforgotten lover, who had taken up his abode so near.

'I am falling into stay-at-home habits as I get older,' he said, after a brief pause, looking at her not altogether unkindly, yet with a shade of suspicion. 'You will have me as a fixture by the hearth henceforward. I hope you will not consider me a nuisance.'

'O Vyvyan, is it not your natural place ?'

'It might be pleasant enough for you if I were younger and brighter ; but a husband of my age, who has so few ideas in common with his wife, ought to spend the greater part of his time out of doors.'

'Why do you say such things, Vyvyan ?' his wife asked reproachfully. 'Have I ever seemed to be tired of your company ?'

'No, he answered shortly, turning from her with a sigh ; you seem perfection. Yes,' with a kinder tone, 'I am sure you are all that is good and pure. I have no complaint against you ; yet—sometimes—I feel as if—the world was out of joint.'

He ended with a stifled sob, and covered his face with his rugged sinewy hands, the hands of a labourer living by the sweat of his brow, rather than of the lord of the soil. Barbara was on her knees beside him in a moment.

'Vyvyan, I am sure you are not well ?'

'Yes, I am well ; as well as I am ever likely to be till I am lying in the old churchyard beside my father and mother. Better for us both when I am gone, Barbara. You have done your duty to me. You might have done less, and still have been blameless ; for I took you knowing that you married me for your mother's sake, for the pitiful pittance my wealth afforded to your people, not for any sordid love of money on your own part. I married you knowing this ; and yet I have been miserable for lack of your love.'

'But, Vyvyan, your kindness has won my love. I do love you.'

'After a fashion. Not as you loved your Indian captain.'

'No,' she answered, crimsoning ; 'such love as that can come only once in a lifetime. You might be as young as he, ever so

much handsomer, braver, better, yet I could never love you as I loved him. That love was given once, and given for ever.'

'You are not ashamed of your love,' said Vyvyan.

'I am not ashamed of the truth. I am talking to you of the past. Why should I lie to you?'

'Why indeed? But would you be as truthful about the present? I suppose you know that your former lover is in the neighbourhood?'

'Yes.'

'Have you no desire to see him?'

'I have seen him once. But I am sure Priscilla has told you all about that.'

'You are right. She has.'

'He came to see me. He had been told, by an enemy of mine, that I was unhappy, and he came to see for himself if it was so. There was nothing in this that a friend might not do. He was glad to know that I was happy in my married life.'

'O, he was glad, was he? And who was the enemy who told him you were unhappy?'

'Mr. Maulford.'

'Mr. Maulford! I don't know what reason he could have for making mischief.'

'None, except a malevolent nature.'

'Humph! I know you dislike Maulford.'

'You see that I had some justification for my dislike.'

'Apparently. And so Major Leland, being home for sick-leave, finds Rockport air suit him better than any other? Well, I suppose I have no right to complain of that, so long as he keeps clear of my house. But I should strongly object to any more visits, surreptitious or otherwise. O, by the way, is it not a long time since your mother and sister were here?'

'Not quite a year.'

'No? Well, let them come again whenever they and you like. Your life must be dismal enough in this old house. It is not much of a privilege for you to have your mother and sister's company.'

'It is a very great privilege for me. But I'm afraid Miss Penruth will not like their coming.'

'Miss Penruth can dislike it. You are mistress here. You married me for your mother's sake. It would be hard if you could not see her when you like.'

'Are you sure that it will not worry you to have them here, Vyvyan, now that you are a little out of health?'

'I am not out of health; and nothing worries me but the idea that you are unhappy.'

CHAPTER XXXI.

FLOSSIE ADMITS HER GUILT.

Mrs. TREVORNOCK and Flossie were quick to respond to Barbara's summons.

The little house in South-lane was a very pleasant abode in these latter days, when there was always a certainty of sending the tax-gatherer away rejoicing, and Amelia could have butcher's meat as often as the most pampered footman on Denmark-hill, were she so inclined. Friendly tea-drinkings occasionally enlivened the monotony of domestic life; and once in a way Mrs. Trevornock would indulge her daughter with a visit to a West-end theatre. Their circle of friends widened a little, for Mrs. Trevornock, with a daughter married to a wealthy Cornish squire, and a new carpet in her drawing-room, took higher rank than of old among her acquaintance, and was asked to more stately tea-parties.

Flossie was admired, and it was prophesied by friendly matrons that she too would make a brilliant marriage in due time; she might not, perhaps, enrol herself among the landed gentry; but there were wealthy drysalters and millionaire soap-boilers floating on the surface of Camberwell society, and who could tell when one of these might be drawn into Flossie's net?

'And then she must have such opportunities at her sister's country seat,' observed the matrons; whereon Mrs. Trevornock was fain to confess that Penruth Place was like heaven, inasmuch as there was neither marrying nor giving in marriage there.

But, dull as the old Cornish mansion was, the mother was always delighted to go there, and Flossie rejoiced at the variety of dulness, which gave Camberwell—and the shops in the Walworth-road—a new zest when she went back.

'And so Miss Penruth is at home, and we are to be honoured with her exhilarating society this time, are we?' said Flossie, when she had opened her box and shown Barbara her new garments, which were of the latest Paris fashion, as interpreted by a Camberwell dressmaker.

'Yes, dear, and I hope you will be polite to her.'

'Polite! I will be as elaborately civil as a character in an old comedy, "Madam, you are vastly obliging;" "I protest, madam, you overwhelm me with your undeserved condescension." Will that kind of thing please her, do you think, Bab?'

'Don't talk nonsense, Flossie. Be as polite as you can; and if she should say anything disagreeable, hold your tongue.'

'That is just the one thing I cannot do,' protested Flossie. 'If she gird at me I must gird again, though I were to risk being forbidden her brother's house for ever after.'

'Flossie, I want to ask you a serious question,' said Barbara.

It was the night of Flossie's arrival. The visitors had dined and refreshed themselves, and now it was bedtime, and the sisters were standing side by side in front of the fire in Flossie's room.

'O!' said Flossie, looking nervous.

'Major Leland is in England.'

'I should call that a statement, and not a question,' said Flossie, trying to be flippant, but inwardly disturbed.

'He is in Cornwall. I have seen him.'

'O,' said Flossie, 'I hope he is very well, and that he—enjoyed himself—in India.'

'Flossie, where did you post that letter I gave you the day I was ill, the last letter I ever wrote to Captain Leland?'

Flossie gasped, and turned pale.

'Where did I post it? I—well, I suppose it must have been at the watchmaker's, where the man was always so civil, you know. He's a German—or perhaps a Swiss, as he's connected with watches. The people in Switzerland seem to devote all their energies to making watches, and taking the bread out of the mouths of the people in Coventry.'

'The letter never reached him, Flossie. Our fate, his and mine, depended upon that one little letter, and he never received it.'

'I suppose if he had got the letter you and he would have been married?' asked Flossie.

'Yes.'

'Then what a blessing that he didn't get it! Think of the difference in your position as mistress of this house, and as an East India Company's Major's wife! For you know, Bab, it was all very well while he was sending in strawberries and salmon and things, we could afford to blind ourselves to the truth; but the Company's service does not rank as high as the Queen's. I'm sure, if the letter did go astray, you ought to be very grateful to Providence for that lucky accident.'

'Yes,' said Barbara bitterly, 'it has made a wide difference in my life. As George's wife I should have been happy.'

'If you are not happy in a house that was built in the time of Cromwell, you have neither artistic taste nor gratitude to God for His mercies,' said Flossie, with a religious air. 'And then think how comfortable you have been able to make poor over-worked ma. A Company's officer could not have given you six hundred a year.'

'Well, there is consolation in that; and Vyvyan is very good to me. Do not think that I am ungrateful to him, or to Providence. But I want to know about that letter. I cannot

understand why that one letter, on which so much depended, should have gone astray. Are you quite sure you posted it, Flossie ?

'I'm quite sure I didn't,' cried Flossie, falling on her knees and bursting into tears. 'I cannot be such a horrid little story-teller as to say I did. I lost the letter, Bab dearest ; and ma and I put our heads together in the kitchen, and we both felt that it was much better for you that the letter had not gone, though there was no knowing whether some officious person in the street wouldn't pick it up and post it ; and we determined to say nothing to you about it ; and the consequence is that you are the wife of one of the richest men in Cornwall, and ought to be as happy as the days are long.'

'O Flossie, you have done your best to break two hearts !' cried Barbara, covering her pale indignant face with her clasped hands. 'And my mother knew of this, my mother joined in the plot against me, my mother whom I have loved so dearly !'

'And you were in duty bound to love her,' argued the indomitable Flossie, who had dried her tears, and prepared herself for action. 'Think how unselfish she has been ; how she has always sacrificed her own pleasure and her own comfort for ours ; how she has waited upon us and cherished us, and has been father and mother both to us. Is it a great thing even if you have sacrificed your own happiness, or what you think would have been your own happiness, in order to make her declining years free from care ? I am sure I would have married the vilest soap-boiler in Camberwell, a creature who only aspires by accident, if by such a marriage I could have secured comfort for my mother.'

'You are right, perhaps. I ought to be grateful for your carelessness and your want of candour,' Barbara answered bitterly. 'But I know George Leland would not have let my mother starve. She would have been cared for, God bless her !'

'I suppose you would have sent ma a ten-pound note once in a blue moon, and would have called that helping your family !' ejaculated Flossie contemptuously.

'Good-night,' said Barbara coldly ; and so she left the delinquent, who knew not whether to consider herself forgiven.

Mark felt his life hedged round with danger after Flossie's arrival at Place. Molly had taken it into her head to be jealous of that young lady ; and as there were eyes to see and tongues to report to her all that went on in the house, Mark felt as if he were for ever under observation. And Flossie, having no one else of the male sex to amuse her, took it into her head to be particularly fascinating to Mark, especially as she wanted to ride one of his horses.

Mark's stud had been severely reduced to two—the useful Pepper, and a thick-set brown cob, impossible for a lady to ride, and not too possible for a gentleman.

Flossie's indoor amusements at Place were limited to novel-reading, fancy work, playing with Mark's dogs, and eating clotted cream in every possible form. Even these mild enjoyments were made less enjoyable by the presence of Miss Penruth, whose countenance since the young lady's coming had fixed itself in a stony disapprobation. Flossie's invention was exercised in finding corners where Priscilla's severe gray eye could not reach her. She would sit on the carpet in the embrasure of a window, screened from view by a curtain that smelt of bygone centuries, gloating over Currer Bell or Mrs. Marsh; and would emerge from her retreat at the sound of the luncheon-bell, smiling defiance at the offended spinster, who had been wondering where she was all the morning.

Out of doors Flossie was free as air. She made friends with all the bipeds and quadrupeds in the stable. She drove Barbara's ponies, with a delightful ignorance of the first principles of driving; and it was only the innate virtue and discretion of those two amiable Norwegians and the primeval solitude of the roads that saved her from ruin and death. Mrs. Trevornock sat by her daughter's side in happy unconsciousness of danger, and admired Flossie's skill and style on the driving-box.

'You really are a very clever girl,' she would say mildly. 'It seems to come natural to you to do things right.'

'That shows the advantage of not having all one's talent ground out of one by a schoolmistress, ma. I really ought to be thankful to Mr. T. for never having expended sixpence on my education. I daresay if I had been carefully trained at an expensive boarding-school, I should be as commonplace as other girls.'

Flossie took to horsemanship just as she took to driving. She was utterly fearless, and she possessed a talent for sticking to her saddle. Beyond this her gifts were small; but Mark admired her boldness and her firm seat, and consented to lend her even the illustrious gray Pepper, a horse out of which he expected to make money before he had done with him. On Pepper, Flossie scoured the moor far and wide, sometimes attended by a groom on one of Vyvyan's horses, sometimes alone. She had serious thoughts of climbing Brown Willy. She could not ascertain that the feat had ever been performed by an equestrian, and this made the idea so much the more attractive.

CHAPTER XXXII.

FLOSSIE'S HAPPY THOUGHT.

ROCKPORT is one of those places which might have been left out of the world without making much difference in the history of mankind ; and yet there are few finer or holdier hits of coast scenery upon the rugged western point of England. It is not so grand a spot as the Land's End, nor so lovely as that pinnacle of many-coloured rock crowned with the Logan Stone, nor so striking as the Lizard ; hut the green hills and gray rocks of that quiet hay, the steep village street, the background of mountain and moor, the winding roads between ferny banks by which the stranger descends from the great Gorse Moors to the little harbour by the water's edge, the parish church among green fields, the cottages and gardens perched anyhow on the edge of a rugged hill-side,—all these are as picturesque and as interesting as anything to be found in Cornwall or in Brittany.

Here, at the cosy inn, kept by kindly people, and running over with the fatness of the land, Major Leland found a halting-place of most exquisite repose, after the troubled days of the year that was gone. He had come back to England seriously ill—come back, as he thought, to die ; and it seemed to him as if it could matter very little to any one, not even to Vyvyan Penruth, where he spent the last few weeks of his life.

'I don't want to make the husband uncomfortable,' he said to himself ; 'but for me it is a kind of happiness to know that I am near the woman I shall love till my heart ceases to beat.'

The quiet beauty of the place and its surroundings pleased him. He was just able to climb to the topmost green point above the sea, and to lie and rest there, smoking his cigar, watching the waves roll in and the gulls skimming whitely above the white crest of lead-coloured water, idly thinking of summer nights more than a year ago, when he had stood on the ridge at Delhi, under the purple Indian sky and the big bright stars, watching the glancing lights in the accursed city, where the old king and his favourites were holding their revels in the palace of the Great Mogul, the Centre of the Universe, the Shadow of God on Earth, in the hall on whose walls the boastful conqueror had inscribed, 'If there is a paradise upon earth, it is here.' The day soon came when the Shadow of God on Earth sat upon an old charpoy, or four-legged bedstead, in that splendid hall where the peacock throne once shed its rainbow light, to be tried for his life by the power he had defied and outraged, and to be sent thence to finish the remnant of his days as a convict in the Andamans.

Sometimes the mornings were fair and sunny, and the sea took its summer hues of emerald and amethyst, and a mistaken bee came humming across the flowerless thyme in search of a

belated harebell or the last tuft of clover. Vessels passed and vanished on the distant horizon; but they carried no thought of George Leland with them. He felt as if he had done with all the earth except just this lonely corner of his native island. He spent many a tranquil hour in the old churchyard on the hill, and it was sweetly sad to him to think that he might lie there before very long, and that Barbara might come some day and kneel beside his grave.

His sisters would gladly have had him among them in Somersetshire, where three out of the four were prosperously settled, and where he would have been nursed and petted exceedingly; but he shrank from the very thought of that loving circle. He wanted to be alone with his grief, now that the busy work of life was over—such work as he had done in India, which had left him so little leisure for thought.

Years had gone since the parting on board the *Hesper*, yet the girl he had clasped in his arms that day was no less dear to him. He had surrendered her of his own accord, believing that to do so was his duty, and he had loved her so much the more because of that surrender. Never had she been dearer to him than when he wrote the letter that renounced her. Never had she been lovelier in his eyes than on that day when he saw her again in her matronly pride and dignity, bearing herself calmly and nobly, true and faithful to her loveless marriage-bond.

He had no thought of seeking a second interview, of introducing himself to her husband. She had said that they might meet as friends, that nothing forbade them to be friends; but his stronger soul revolted against such a mockery of friendship.

'She must be all the world to me, or nothing,' he told himself.

No one at the Waterloo Inn, Rockport, knew that he had any acquaintance with the family at Place. He was only known to his landlord and landlady as an Indian officer who had come to mend a broken constitution on that breezy coast. He soon won the liking of host and hostess, and, the inn being almost empty at this time of year, they devoted themselves to making him comfortable. From his landlady, who was inclined to indulge herself now and then with a cheerful gossip, Major Leland contrived to hear a good deal about Barbara and the family at Place. He heard how good she was, how the servants liked and respected her, how kind she had been, in her quiet unpretentious way, to the poor.

'Miss Penruth used to set herself up as the Lady Bountiful to all the district,' said Mrs. Thomas of the Waterloo; 'but Mrs. Penruth gives a sovereign where her sister-in-law would give sixpence, and makes no fuss about it. And everybody knows what a good wife she is, though nobody can suppose that she married the Squire for love.'

'So long as she is happy, that is enough,' said George Leland. She had told him she was happy, and he had not believed her. He had regarded that assertion as an heroic falsehood.

Mrs. Thomas expatiated upon the family at Place : she spoke of Mr. Mark, who was not thought highly of, though he was liked for his easy good-nature and absence of pride, and who was supposed to have entangled himself in an uncomfortable manner with a handsome barmaid at Camelot. And then Mrs. Thomas told her lodger all she could tell about the cottage on the St. Columb road, and how that abode was now shut up ; whereby it was supposed that the Squire's brother and the barmaid had parted ; perhaps because of the Squire having got wind of the disreputable alliance.

'He's just the sort of man to be very strict in such matters,' said Mrs. Thomas. 'The Penruths always were a proud family, all except Mark.'

She told her lodger how changed the Squire had been by his late illness ; how he had been gradually giving up all his old ways ever since last summer ; and how it was supposed in the neighbourhood that he was breaking up, and would never be again the man he had been.

'They're not a long-lived family,' she remarked conclusively. 'The father was under fifty when he was taken off sudden by heart-disease. I never saw such a change in any one as in Mr. Penruth, when I saw him at church four Sundays ago. There was a strange preacher come from Plymouth to preach for the schools, and the Squire and his ladies drove over to hear him. He looked a good ten years older than he did last Christmas. He used to be the hardest rider in these parts. He'd come tearing over the moor on a big brown horse, or driving a high dog-cart, and going faster than the mail. He used to be out and about all day long. And now they d' say he sits staring at the fire or reading his newspaper for hours at a stretch. It's not his young wife's fault if he's dull and melancholy ; for everybody says how good and dutiful she has been to him, though it can hardly be expected that a handsome young woman can care much for a grumpy old man like Vyvyan Penruth.'

'Handsome is as handsome does,' said Major Leland. 'She may have learnt to love him for the sake of his goodness to her. She seems happy, does she not ?'

'She behaves herself as a lady should,' replied Mrs. Thomas, with a sententious air ; 'everybody says that of her ; and that's as much as anybody has a right to know. We can't go prying into the insides of people's hearts and minds, you see, sir. We must form our judgment from the outside, and be content. We've no more to do with what lies behind than we have to grumble because there's a dark side to the moon while her bright side is lighting us over the moor.'

Was she happy? That was the question which George Leland perpetually asked of himself. She had assured him that all was well with her, that she was happy in her married life. But this assurance he took to be a noble falsehood, a woman's sacrifice to her own self-respect. The thought that she could be happy while he was so miserable for the loss of her maddened him. He knew that this impotent jealousy, this rage against the fate that had parted them, was a base and a hateful feeling, yet he could not conquer it. He who had fought so stoutly against his country's foes was in this no hero. He could not subjugate self.

He was lying one day on a grassy headland, listless, low-spirited, having read all the news that interested him in yesterday's *Times*, and having nothing to do for the live-long day but watch the sea and the gulls, with faint hopes of an occasional cormorant to diversify the scene. The morning was mild and sunny, though November had begun; summery-looking clouds were floating in a blue sky, and lending their varied colour to a summery sea. The soft air seemed laden with a ghostly perfume, the odour of the dead year's flowers; or perhaps it was only the sweet scent of an upland turnip-field, or that untraceable mysterious perfume which exhales from the very earth on such a morning, the spirit of fallow field and fading woodland, faint breathings from hidden violets under ragged hedges where the sturdy redbreast swings a-top of a thorn, and carols his welcome to the coming winter.

Startled from a gloomy reverie, George Leland looked up at the sound of horse's hoofs bounding over the short turf, and beheld a young lady in a blue habit, fair-haired, rosy-cheeked, blue-eyed, a bright familiar face, which he had known in the happiest period of his life.

'Flossie!' he cried, starting to his feet.

'How do you do, Captain—I beg your pardon, Major—Leland?' said Flossie, just as coolly as if they had parted yesterday.

There she sat, looking down upon him from the altitude of a big gray horse—a horse of undecided temperament, who had hardly made up his mind whether he would be gray or roan, and had subsided into a speckly mixture of both, which justified his name, Pepper and Salt. She sat her big awkward horse as easily as if she had been born in the saddle, and she was as pretty and almost as pert as she had been five years ago in the garden at Camberwell, when they two had waltzed together on the soft springy turf, amidst night dews and roses, under a summer moon. Yet at sight of his gaunt wasted figure and faded face, lit by large haggard eyes, even Flossie's impertinence was put to the blush.

She looked at him earnestly, her eyes filling with tears.

'You are sadly altered,' she said, 'since—since—'

'Since the happy time when we were all young ; since the summer day when Barbara and I lost ourselves under the Greenwich elms. Yes, I daresay I am changed since then. Such a campaign as I have gone through is not calculated to improve a man's personal appearance.'

He spoke lightly, but his hand trembled a little as he held Flossie's bridle, while the fidgety Pepper dug holes in the turf with his fore-feet.

'I wish I could hook this horse on to something, and dismount,' said Flossie. 'He is a wretched beast that will never consent to stand still ; and I should like to have a long talk with you.'

'I'll take care of the horse,' said Major Leland ; whereupon Flossie dropped lightly from her saddle, and gave the Major the bridle.

There was a nondescript little building surrounded with rusty iron railings on the highest pinnacle of the cliff. Only a native of the soil could have told if there was any use or any intention in it. It might have been intended as a rude temple dedicated to the winds, and it might have been that Boreas and his brotherhood did not deem the fane worthy of their acceptance; for they rushed in at its grated windows, and tore round it and howled over it with exceeding savagery in tempestuous weather, as if they had marked it for destruction. No visitor to Rockport had the faintest idea of its meaning ; but it was a mark in the landscape for those aspiring climbers who are always shouting 'Excelsior !' and the railings were handy to lean against when one had struggled to the summit of the grassy hill, and, if the winds were battering against three sides of the building, there was a chance of shelter on the fourth.

Here, the day being quiet and fair, Major Leland led the submissive Pepper, who seemed to think he was going to get a bait, and anon fastened his bridle securely to the railings on the landward side, and left the patient beast to crop the short salt turf, while he went back to Flossie, who was walking slowly up and down a narrow path upon the steep grassy slope fronting the sea. He held out both his hands and grasped hers warmly.

'I am very glad to see you, Flossie,' he said. 'There is only one other person in the world whom I would rather see.'

'You would not say that if you knew everything,' she protested, shaking her head with a contrite air ; 'you would hate me.'

'I should hate you if I knew—what ?'

'You are very sorry to have lost Barbara, I am afraid ?' she said, looking at him deprecatingly.

'Sorry ? Yes, I am sorry. It is a sorrow that will last me for my lifetime, and go down with me to my grave.'

'Don't,' cried Flossie; 'you make me feel like a murderer. Is it that sorrow which has altered you so?'

'No, my dear. Grief and regret have gnawed my heart; but I went on living all the same—ate, drank, slept, thrived as a brute thrives in his pasture. Hardship and privation, forced marches, deadly heat and dreary rain,—these are the things that have sapped my strength, and perhaps shortened my life. But, for God's sake, tell me what you mean, Flossie! Why should I hate you? what had you to do with my sorrow?'

'Ever so much. Barbara wrote you a letter.'

'Yes.'

'One very enormously particular letter.'

'Yes, I know, and it never reached me. She told me of it.'

'I lost it,' said Flossie, blurring out her confession, and looking him full in the face, with an air half deprecating, half defiant, almost as if she expected him to knock her down. 'I lost it. I had ever so many things to get for ma, and there were all kinds of new things in the shop-windows in the Walworth-road—gloves at a shilling and elevenpence-halfpenny, with the elevenpence-halfpenny written in pencil, you know—so deceiving; and there were bonnets and all sorts of fancy articles, which you wouldn't understand if I were to tell you about them; and altogether I never saw the Road more attractive; and so—I suppose I must have dropped the letter,' said Flossie very slowly, after rattling on at the rate of an express train; 'for when I got to the post-office—the watchmaker's, you know, where the man was always civil—it was gone. I don't suppose my pocket had been picked; for, you see, a thief would hardly care about a flimsy Indian letter without a stamp on it, and I had the shilling ready to pay for the stamp. That reminds me, by the bye, I owe Barbara that shilling.'

'But there was no crime in losing the letter; Barbara could have written another. Why, in Heaven's name, could you not act frankly and tell her? I thought you were all truthfulness.'

'So I am,' protested Flossie. 'My every-day character is frank to a fault. But this was one of those extraordinary events in life where one is tempted to go a little off the straight track. Don't you remember telling us about Clive—how he took in that poor old Indian with a sham treaty? and I have no doubt that, in a common way, Clive was a very frank man—'

'Never mind Clive, Flossie. Tell me why you acted so falsely.'

'Well, you see, mamma and I talked it over, and it did seem such a pity that Barbara should be engaged to you, who were thousands of miles away, and had got yourself into difficulties, when here was Mr. Penruth on the spot, and one of the richest men in Cornwall, and desperately in love with her—in love to

such a degree that hothouse grapes at half a guinea a pound were as nothing to him. And mamma thought it was Providence that had interfered to make me lose that letter; and it really looked like it, for I never did such a thing before; and it would have seemed like flying in the face of Providence to go and tell Barbara, and let her write again. It would have been, as it were, frustrating the good intentions of higher powers; so we decided to say nothing to Barbara—and—that's all.'

'That's all!' echoed Major Leland. 'You only broke two hearts, or one at least. I will answer nothing for the other.'

'Come now, you said just now that it was the climate and hardships and forced marches—'

'Yes, those brought me to the brink of the grave. But it was not climate or hardship that broke my heart, Flossie. Well, I have no right to complain—I will not complain, if she is content; but to have been so near happiness and to have missed it—that is hard. At that time, when my honour and honesty had been doubted, it seemed to me my duty to release my dearest girl from her promise. To do less would have been to prove myself unworthy of her love. Was she, in her trusting faith, loving me fondly and blindly, to link her young life to a man of blighted character? The idea of such a sacrifice was intolerable to me, and I did not hesitate in writing the letter which renounced all hope of happiness. But when that letter had gone, when the long slow months wore on, I doing journeyman's work at an up-country station, how I hungered and thirsted for a letter from my love—one little letter, telling me that she was sorry for me, that she did not let me go without regret!'

'And all that time some nasty selfish creature was treasuring up Bab's letter as a curiosity, I daresay,' said Flossie, glad to transfer some part of the burden of wrong to an unknown individual.

'I will try to be content, and think that all things have happened for the best,' said George Leland, with a smile that moved Flossie more than even tears could have done.

'We were very, very poor when Bab consented to marry Mr. Penruth,' pursued Flossie apologetically. 'Our dear mother was ill; her health seemed to be breaking up altogether. We had no one to help us. It was like the old song Barbara used to sing in those happy summer evenings. Yes, indeed, it was just the story of Auld Robin Gray over again. And now Barbara has a grand old house and a carriage and a pony phaeton, and might wallow in gold if she liked; and poor ma and I are provided for. You would hardly know us at Camberwell. The drawing-room is lovely—new carpet, new curtains, old china—you know how clever mamma is in picking up cups and saucers and things in odd out-of-the-way brokers' shops. It is the dearest little room. We are even thinking of a new piano.'

'Can I grudge you your happiness, Flossie, even if it has cost me my own? No, dear, I am resigned, if Barbara is happy.'

'If she is not she ought to be,' answered Flossie confidently. 'She has an excellent and most indulgent husband in his own grumpy way. She is allowed to have us for a long visit every year, and you must admit that is a privilege.'

'She has her mother with her sometimes; I am glad of that.'

'And me,' said Flossie.

'Well, I will believe that she is happy, and be content. The greatest happiness for the greatest number, that is the supreme good. Somebody must be left out in the cold.'

'I am sure we have all reason to be thankful,' said Flossie. 'If you had come home before the Mutiny, and had married Barbara, and taken her back to India with you, think how dreadful that might have been!'

'Might have been!' echoed George Leland shudderingly. 'Yes, that would have been too horrible. My darling, my innocent dove, at the mercy of those savages! No, I thank God for the fate that parted us, if by that alone she could be saved from being even a witness of the things that were done by those hell-hounds! Can the few who were saved ever forget those days? Those days of anguish and suspense, when the men who were fighting for their country trembled at the thought of their dear ones far away in the hills; when every day brought its tale of another revolted regiment, another cruel slaughter, helpless women starving in the jungle, or hiding in cellars, danger and death in every hideous shape. Can the mothers whose babies were slain upon their breasts ever be happy again? Yes, there is something to be thankful for in that. She might have been amongst those forlorn ones.'

They paced slowly along the narrow track in silence for a few minutes, George Leland's thoughts travelling back to the year that was gone and the things that he had seen. How deeply he had pitied the men who had wives and children in those days!

'You see,' said Flossie cheerfully, after this pause, 'Providence is always good. Providence brought Mr. Penruth just when our poor mother could not have struggled on any longer without substantial help. Providence made me lose that letter.'

'And Providence brought you here this morning, I suppose, to tell me how you contrived to do it?' said the Major, with his half-sad, half-bitter smile.

'Well, I hardly know,' replied Flossie musingly. 'I had a sort of idea that I should see you if I rode this way; and as I do just as I like and go just where I like in this wild out-of-the-way hole, and have the run of that horse Pepper, which belongs to my sister's brother-in-law, Mark Penruth, a very obliging person, I thought I might just as well come and look you up.'

'You knew I was staying here?'

'Of course. Do you for a moment suppose that anybody can go anywhere or do anything in this desolate place without everybody else knowing all about it?'

'Did Barbara know you were coming?'

'O dear, no! I didn't so much as hint at my intention. She might have asked me not to come.'

'And will you tell her that you have seen me?'

'I think not. It couldn't do any good, you know, and it might unsettle her mind. The very best thing she can do is to forget your existence, which, by the way, she can hardly be expected to do while you are living within half a dozen miles of her house. Don't you think you could contrive to go and get well somewhere else?'

'I shall not stay here much longer. But I like the quiet of the place, and the air has done wonders for me.'

'Poor fellow! How bad you must have been before you began to get better!' exclaimed Flossie, with a compassionate look at his hollow cheeks.

'Yes, I shall soon move on upon my journey, Flossie. It matters very little where I go for the rest—'

'For the rest of your furlough, or whatever you call it,' interrupted Flossie. 'If you are indifferent where you go, why shouldn't you come and stay with us at Camberwell, when we go back, which is to be in a week or two? Mamma would be delighted to have you—as a visitor, you know; and she and I would take such care of you, and feed you up till you were as strong as a lion. Ma makes delicious beef-tea and jelly and all the things an invalid ought to have. Do come.'

'You are very good, Flossie. Yes, I should like to be under your roof; there would be sadness in it, but pleasure too—to walk up and down the old garden-path where she and I dawdled away so many an hour. But I should hardly recognise your house and garden in winter. When I call up the picture of that garden it is always summer, summer evening, and Venus is shining placidly in the pale-gray sky above the hazels at the end of the walk, and the soft air is scented with roses and jasmines. Yes, I should dearly like to be in your quiet little home, Flossie. It is a happy thought of yours. There is no place that would do me so much good.'

'I am so glad,' faltered Flossie. 'I will do all I can to please you and to make up for my carelessness, for my wickedness, about that letter. And now I must go back as fast as I can. Poor Pepper must be tired of those railings, and I'm afraid he will have eaten enough grass to make himself ill.'

'Hardly, I think, with the bit in his mouth. And now, Flossie, one word before we part. If it should ever come to your knowledge that your sister were in any trouble of mind, any

difficulty, in which a man's honest will could aid her, remember that I would give my life to save her an hour's pain. Remember, dear, though I shall love her fondly to the end of all things, I am a soldier and a gentleman, and I am to be trusted. It is not likely that she will ever need my help, but God knows it would be given faithfully.'

'I am sure of that,' said Flossie, as they walked up the slope to the railed enclosure. 'And it is a promise that you are to come to us, is it not?'

'Yes, it is a promise.'

'I shall write to you here when I know the date of our return.'

'Could you not ride over and see me again?'

'Do you really like to see me?'

'Very much.'

'Then I'll come.'

And presently she was mounted on Pepper, and rode slowly off, smiling back at the Major, as she walked her horse zigzag fashion down the breast of the hill.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

A FRIENDLY WARNING.

SOME days passed before Mark could find any opportunity for private conversation with the inestimable Mrs. Morris. That lady's caution was so great that she avoided all encounters with the Squire's brother which might possibly come within the ken of any member of the household. But after that interview with his brother, in which Vyvyan had revealed the contents of his will, Mark had a natural desire to impart his knowledge to the woman whom it concerned so nearly. He watched his opportunity therefore, and came home earlier than usual from the quarries one afternoon at the beginning of November, in order to lie in wait for Mrs. Morris in the dusky corridor, before the lighting of lamps and candles.

He had not been long in the corridor, lounging on a window-seat, looking absently out at the shadowy hills, when Mrs. Morris appeared, carrying the afternoon letters and papers on a salver. Miss Penruth excelled as a letter-writer, and kept up a wide correspondence with absent friends. What they could all find to write about must ever remain a mystery to the outside world.

At sight of Mark's figure, half hidden by the embrasure of the window, Molly started and paled. She had seemed curiously nervous of late—the effect, perhaps, of her false position, which must trouble even so skilled a dissimulator.

'Take the letters,' said Mark, 'and then come back to me as quick as you can. I want a talk with you.'

She nodded yes, and tripped lightly away with her salver ; and in three minutes came back to him, and seated herself quietly by his side in the dusk.

It was the servants' tea-time, the hour for buttered toast and unlimited gossip, and there was little chance of any one coming to light the lamps yet awhile.

'What is it all about, Mark ?' she asked.

'My brother has acted nobly,' he began—'so generously that I can hardly speak of his conduct without making a fool of myself. He has made his will, Molly, and he has made me his heir. I am a hard-hearted beast for feeling glad and proud at the idea of succeeding him. He knows, poor dear fellow, that he has not long to live ; and he has reconciled himself to the notion of my stepping into his shoes ; and we have been over the map of the estate together, and he has talked to me a great deal of late about the property.'

'He has made his will,' said Molly ; 'you are sure ?'

'I have his word for it, and he never told me a lie.'

'Well, you are a lucky man, Mark ; ever so much luckier than you deserve to be.'

'I know that,' assented Mark meekly.

'Because a poor-spirited fellow like you would never do anything of his own account. You would never be rich if somebody else's fortune did not drop into your lap.'

'Perhaps not, Molly ; but you needn't taunt me with that. I've run the risk of losing everything for your sake, and if it isn't in your nature to be grateful, you might at least strain a point and be civil.'

'Don't be cross, Mark,' she said, laying her hand upon his shoulder. 'Everything will be made up to us when we have got the estate. Won't the Camelot folks stare when I ride through the town in my carriage and pair ! I would have six horses, just as old Sir Massey Lopes used to have, only it would be too much like a circus.'

'Six fiddlesticks !' muttered Mark. 'When I have a pack of hounds I'll drive you to the meet in my drag, if you like—for I mean to keep a drag and a good team ; but, in an ordinary way, I should think a pony-chaise ought to satisfy you. But now, Molly, I am going to talk seriously. In the face of what I have just told you, with the certainty that you and I will be master and mistress here before we are many years older, I can't, and I won't, stand this masquerading of yours any longer. You and your widow's weeds must clear out of this immediately.'

'I understand,' said Molly, with a vixenish tightening of her lips. 'Now Miss Flossie is here I am in the way. I must make myself scarce immediately, in order to leave the coast clear for your flirtations.'

'Miss Flossie has nothing to do with it ; and I've had too

great a sickener of your sex to care about flirtations with a female angel,' retorted Mark, waxing savage. 'You must get out of this house at once, simply because it isn't decent that my wife should be here in such a position.'

'Well, Mark, only be reasonable,' pleaded Molly, with a sudden change from the virago to the turtle dove. 'I came here to watch your interests, and I am quite willing to go now that your interests are secured; but I can't go at an hour's notice. I must hatch some story to tell your sister. I must leave as respectably as I came. I'll say that I've received a letter from my aged mother in Lincolnshire, who is very ill, and wants me at home to nurse her. And I'll give your sister a month's notice.'

'A month!' ejaculated Mark. 'Why a month? Your aged mother would be dead and buried in that time!'

'Not if it was a chronic disorder—some lingering wasting complaint. A month is not long notice to give your sister, Mark, after she has made me a confidential servant. She would get suspicious and begin to make inquiries, perhaps, if I wanted to go away suddenly.'

'Well, I never could understand your motive for coming here, and I can no more fathom your motive for staying here. But all I have to say is, get out of the place as soon as you can.'

'Yes,' answered Molly, deep in thought, 'as soon as I can.'

She started at the ringing of a bell, and left him alone in the thickening darkness.

'I can't understand her,' he said to himself. 'I wish she was fair and above-board—like Flossie.'

And then he sighed, as he had sighed once before, at the mention of Flossie's name. It was not that he had any evil thought about her—any unholy dream or hope. It was only because she was so different from the woman to whom he had bound himself.

From that time forward Mark's mind was curiously divided between an honest affection for his brother and a natural pride in the things which were soon to be his own. He tried very hard to shut out of his mind that haunting idea of future possession; but the stoicism required for such self-abnegation was beyond the reach of Mark's weak nature. In the stables, in the house, in the grounds, he thought of the day when his own reign should begin, and the level monotony which had prevailed for the last half century should give place to the animated life of a sporting squire's household. He could not even keep silent as to those schemes of alteration and improvement which were for ever developing themselves in his brain. He talked to the old head-groom of what he would do in the stables if he were master: how he would knock down this and clear away that, build loose boxes instead of the old stalls, lift off dilapidated

roofs, give light and air to stables which, though spacious enough, to accommodate a stud of thirty hunters, were little better than cattle-sheds for arrangement and comfort; build kennels and cooking-house in the paddock at the back of the stable-yard, and make Place altogether worthy to be called a gentleman's abode.

The old servants liked well enough to hear him talk, and encouraged him to expatiate upon his day-dream. There was no treason against Vyvyan in such discourse. Every man must die when his time comes; and, as there seemed no likelihood of the elder brother becoming the father of a family, Mark was accepted generally as the future master of all things. He would be a pleasant easy-going ruler, people thought, and would spend his money in a large open-handed manner, which would allow of a good deal of its dropping through his fingers into the pockets of other people.

While he is still flushed with the novelty of his position as Vyvyan's declared heir, while his spirits, despite his efforts to feel sorry for his brother's shortened life, were at their highest, the cup of hope was suddenly dashed from his hand, and he felt that on him too fell the chill shade of the common doom—that he too was but a passing shadow upon life's changeful scene.

He went into Vyvyan's den one morning, to wait for his brother, who had something to say to him about one of the farms, and, being tired and flushed with an early gallop upon the brown cob, flung himself into Vyvyan's armchair, and took a long pull of the honest brown October out of Vyvyan's stout old George II. tankard. Refreshed by the draught, he lay back in his chair indulging in that day-dream which had beguiled him so often of late—the thought of what he should do when he was master. Thus, with his eyes half closed, he rested his tired limbs, and dreamed his dream of horse and hound, spaniel and gun, otter-hunt and steeplechase, without count of time, knowing that Vyvyan would come to him as soon as he had finished his interview with an offending tenant who had been caught in the act of bartering the straw which, in the form of manure, should have enriched the land he rented. Vyvyan would come in due time; and in the mean while the day-dream went on, and Mark saw himself flying over a big water-jump at Lanivet steeplechase, to the admiration of the assembled multitude.

But, lo, what is this dull lethargy, never felt in his life before, which steals over him in the midst of his fancied triumph, and blots the visionary racecourse and the visionary crowd from the scene, and clouds the real parlour and the low red fire, till the smouldering logs look like patches of dull light seen afar off athwart a land of shadows? What is the meaning of this death-

like nausea, these cold drops of sweat that break out suddenly upon his brow, this dreadful sensation of sinking through the ground, there where he sits in his brother's armchair? Yes, as if the floor were empty space, and he was sinking slowly through into a pit beneath. What does it mean? Alas for those new-fledged hopes of his, he knows too well. That slowly-throbbing heart, with dull laborious beat, not twenty-five to the minute, gives him the answer to his question. The doom is on him too—not on his brother alone, but on him, the younger, as well as the elder. Hereditary heart-disease! As his father died in the prime and vigour of manhood, as he has been told his brother must die, so too must he die. This is his first warning. Fool, to have known of the doom of father and brother, and not to have expected the same fate for himself!

He sank into a sleep that was more like lethargy than slumber; and so Vyvyan found him half an hour afterwards.

'Why, Mark, old fellow, asleep at midday!' cried the Squire. 'This is taking life easily with a vengeance.'

And then, seeing the livid hue of the sleeper's face, Vyvyan took alarm. He bent over his brother, felt the cold forehead and hands, and shook him gently to rouse him.

'Wake up,' he said, taking a bottle from a cupboard by the fireplace, and pouring out half a tumbler of brandy. 'You must have a dose of my medicine.'

He had some difficulty in making his brother drink the brandy. His sleep was almost stupor. When he opened his eyes at last he looked at Vyvyan wonderingly, as at a stranger.

'Forty feet,' he said; 'not many horses would have cleared it as clean as that, would they, old flick?'

'Finish that brandy, Mark; you've been dreaming,' said Vyvyan.

'Yes; I dreamt I was going down to the bottomless pit.'

'What do you mean?'

'I was sinking through the floor, collapsing into my boots, melting into nothing. It was a disgusting sensation.'

'Great God!' cried Vyvyan. 'That is what I feel when I have my heart-attacks.'

'And this was heart. We're both in the same boat, Vyvyan, said Mark gloomily. 'You needn't have troubled to make a will in my favour. We're both entered for the same race, old fellow; and who can tell which horse will be first to pass the judge's chair?'

'This is horrible,' sighed Vyvyan, throwing himself upon the sofa. 'I never contemplated the possibility of such a thing. The thought of my poor father's untimely death never suggested a fear for my own life, or for yours. I know that consumption is hereditary. Wherever there is *that* taint in the blood, there is cause for fear. But heart-disease—can that too be a heritage

from father to son? And in my father's case there was no warning. I never heard him complain. Have you never felt this before, Mark?'

'Never, so help me, Heaven!'

'What had you been doing this morning? Over-exerting yourself, I daresay. It was a long day on that black horse you bought me that brought on my first attack.'

'Yes, I suppose that was what did it for me. I had a tremendous gallop over the moor this morning. I wanted to take it out of Fiddlehead before I rode him with Flossie. He's one of the best horses I ever rode, but a confounded puller. I felt dead-beat when I came in here, and as dry as a limekiln. I nearly emptied your tankard.'

'Well, you see, Mark,' said the Squire thoughtfully, 'we are both mortal. While we are building our barns and adding to our lands, the fiat goes forth, "Thou fool"—you know the rest. We must look the future in the face, Mark. If I had a son—or you had a son—I would bow to Fate, and make no moan. But to think that the estate should go to a beggarly heir-at-law—Jack Philip, of Liskeard—who will take out a patent, and call himself Philip Penruth, perhaps, and think himself as big as the biggest of us! The thought of that fellow is enough to make me alter my will, and leave the land to my wife, even though I know she would hand over everything to her Indian free-lance, after wearing widow's weeds for a year or so.'

'Don't do that,' gasped Mark, still faint from the prostration of his attack. 'Who knows how long you and I may live? You may have a son—or I. Don't alter your will; let that stand. Anything—even a scurvy fellow like Jack Philip—would be better than that your widow's second husband should be master here. He would be the worst of aliens.'

'Not worse than a beggarly attorney in a beggarly country town,' answered Vyvyan testily. 'I would rather the Crown had my estate than Jack Philip. Well, I can leave it all to a charity, that's one comfort.'

'Let your will stand, Vyvyan. Be reasonable. I may have a secret to tell you before long—a secret that may alter the state of affairs.'

'I understand,' said Vyvyan; 'you are thinking of getting married. Well, go on and prosper. You are eleven years my junior. Take this business of to-day as a warning to live quietly, and perhaps you may spin out the thread of life to a decent length. We mustn't let fears or fancies kill us.'

'Mine was no fancy,' said Mark despondently; 'it was the most horrible sensation I ever had in my life.'

'Didcott has advised me to leave off beer, and drink nothing but weak brandy-and-water,' said Vyvyan, ringing the bell for a fresh supply of home-brewed; 'but I am a creature of habit,

and must live my life my own way, even at the risk of shortening it. I couldn't get on without my morning tankard.'

Vyvyan thought much of his brother's illness. The idea that his race was destined to perish out of the land haunted him like a nightmare. It had been hard for him to reconcile himself to the thought that he himself must go, that another must be master of the things he loved, though that other one were his own brother; but that they should go to an alien was a far bitterer thought.

'If Mark would but marry!'

What, to rear a sickly race—children tainted with hereditary disease? How could he tell upon what future generations this doom might descend? If upon him and upon his brother, why not upon his brother's children?

'We are an expiring race,' he said to himself; 'the canker is at the root, and the tree must fall.'

His conduct to his brother after this time showed more affection, in his own rough and rugged way, than it had ever done before. As he had pitied himself, when the knowledge of his doom was first revealed to him, so now he pitied his brother.

'Still in the prime of life, and taking life so lightly,' he thought. 'It must be harder for him than for me to know that his days are to be short in the land.'

A change came over Mark after that sudden shock, which reminded him of life's uncertainty. He said nothing to the woman who had hitherto shared most of his secrets. He shrank, just as Vyvyan had done, from talking of this thing; but he thought of it day and night.

The images of those three little lads at St. Columb haunted him at this time, and were his chief source of trouble. Something must be done for them. If he were to die before his elder brother, and Vyvyan were to do what he had threatened—leave his estate to a charity? Where then would be home and shelter and means for those three curly pates, who had composed themselves into such pretty pictures, climbing about their father's knees in the winter fireglow? Those chubby cheeks and innocent laughing eyes were always before Mark's mental vision in these days. Something must be done—nay, one thing alone could be done. His brother must be told of the existence of the boys, and of their claim upon his bounty, their right to call themselves by his name.

'He will be furiously angry—he will turn me out of his house, perhaps,' thought Mark; 'but I sha'n't mind that, if he will only be good to them. I am the sinner.'

And then Mark remembered with a heavy heart how one awful passage in Holy Writ declared that the sins of the fathers should be visited upon the children. And he had of his own

experience seen how the thing does happen in life, and how the innocent offspring have to pay the penalty of the parents' crime.

'But mine is not a crime,' argued Mark. 'At the worst it is but an error. Why should I be afraid to tell him?'

Why, indeed, save for the reason that some natures are fashioned so limply that they recoil from every act which requires a bracing up of nerves and will, and a bold face-to-face encounter with stern necessity. Mark knew that if he confessed his fault to his brother there would be a storm of anger to be lived through, and Mark loved fair weather. Yet he had now come to a crisis in which he told himself that Vyvyan must learn the truth. The only question was as to when and how the revelation was to be made.

'If I were to tell Molly that I'm likely to die suddenly, as my father did, she wouldn't let me have an hour's peace,' he thought. 'She would worry me into my grave.'

For this reason, therefore, if for this only, he told Molly nothing of his illness that morning in Vyvyan's den.

Time was hurrying on, the leaves were falling, the days shortening, the mists of November creeping over the hill, and the date of Mrs. Morris's departure was fast approaching; much to the annoyance of Miss Penruth, who declared that she should never again get a maid to suit her so well.

'She is a most admirable person,' she said, in the family circle. 'I only wish that people of superior station were her intellectual equals or had her sound ideas of right and wrong. All I wonder is how such a person as Mrs. Nichols could have become acquainted with a woman of such a type.'

Mark heard, and shivered with apprehension. If ever the truth about Mrs. Morris should come to be known, how would Miss Penruth be induced to pardon an imposture which must needs make her appear ridiculous!

Meanwhile life went on smoothly enough in the dull old house. Mrs. Trevornock was happy with her elder daughter; she sat by the drawing-room fire working, or went for a drive in the landau, or wrote an occasional letter to aunt Sophia, expatiating upon the splendour of her daughter's surroundings and the sterling goodness of her son-in-law. Vyvyan spent a good deal of his time alone in his study, making business a pretext for seclusion. Flossie contrived to be out as much as possible, and indoors amused herself tolerably with reading novels, petting Mark's dogs, and teasing Mark, whom she appeared to consider sent into this world for her to worry. Yet if to be so worried had been the darkest feature in Mark's life, he would hardly have deemed existence a burden.

It was within three days of Mrs. Morris's departure, and the rest of the household, with a natural detestation of new favourites, were all rejoicing in their impending loss. People

who keep themselves apart from the common herd may be respected, but they are rarely liked; and Mrs. Morris had lived in a retirement which was taken as a tacit assertion of her superiority to her fellow-workers.

'She must take her meals in her own room, forsooth,' said Gilmore the housekeeper, mother to Mrs. Penruth's own maid; 'as if *we* weren't good enough for her company; and she looks down upon chapel-people, if you please. Well, she be going, and joy go with her! I'd rather have Thomasine Tudway's faults than her virtues, though Miss Penruth do set such store by her.'

Vyvyan sat alone by his study fire after breakfast upon this November morning. It was some time since he had had any return of the old attack, yet he was far from well. He had never recovered the strength he lost while he lay prostrate with rheumatic pain and low fever. The change from a life spent for the most part in open-air exercise, with ample occupation for mind and body, to dull brooding days by a fireside, overshadowed and possessed by one fixed idea, is a change that no man can undergo without mental and physical deterioration. Vyvyan Penruth was no more like the man he had been four months ago than he was like Hercules; and it was when nerves and body were in this degenerate state that the heaviest blow which was ever aimed at him fell with crushing weight upon his dejected soul.

The morning mail brought him only one letter—a letter addressed in an unknown hand, the characterless copper-plate style of a tradesman's circular, the post-mark, Camelot.

'An account of some kind,' he thought, and listlessly tore open the envelope.

This was the letter:

'Take a plain warning from one who is a friend to you and your family. Your wife's lover is at Rockport, and it may not be very long before he and she are over the border. They have been seen together. Ask your father-in-law's late clerk, Lewis Maulford, how these two young people were together at Southampton before the Captain sailed for India—how they were seen in the town—and how the lady went back to London in a third-class carriage, veiled and muffled, to escape notice. Curious, to say the least of it; but Mrs. T. brought up her girls curiously. This is meant in all friendliness. It may not be too late to save the lady's reputation and your honour. Forewarned is forearmed.'

'An anonymous letter! a tissue of lies, most likely,' Vyvyan told himself; 'or of truths so distorted as to be more false than unalloyed falsehood.'

Yet while he argued with himself he believed, and his heart hardened itself against the wife who had given him duty and obedience, but not love.

That Major Leland was at Rockport, he knew. Priscilla had taken care to keep him informed on that point. But that Barbara and he had met? No, he could hardly believe that. She had never been out alone within his knowledge; but she and Flossie had gone for long drives across the moor, in the pony carriage, unattended. A girl of Flossie's stamp would connive at any wrong-doing, out of mere frivolity. Yes, they had met, no doubt, those three, and Flossie's presence was but a poor safeguard.

And the story of a meeting at Southampton years ago. That was a darker history perhaps. That involved character—was in itself enough to blight a woman's reputation.

'If there is any truth in that charge, what can I think of her, how can I believe in her henceforward?' he asked himself.

And then, pale with suppressed passion, with dry throat and parched lips, he stretched out his hand mechanically to the old silver tankard that held his morning draught—always put ready for him on his table at eleven o'clock—and drank with feverish avidity nearly to the bottom of the cup.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

'UNFRIENDED, NEW-ADOPTED TO OUR HATE.'

VYVYAN PENRUTH paced up and down his room with the anonymous letter crushed in his bony hand.

How much did it mean, or how little? Unversed though he was in the ways of the world outside his own small kingdom, he was not so weak as to surrender his opinions—his own honest faith in his wife's goodness and truth—at the first attack of a nameless assailant. Yet, granted that this anonymous slanderer was a scoundrel, here was a plain fact stated, open to proof, which if true would stamp his wife as unworthy of the confidence he had given her.

Alone at Southampton with her lover; for how long or how short a time? She had been seen with him at Southampton before he sailed. That was all the letter stated. But the secret return—muffled and veiled—implied that their meeting had been stealthy, in some wise shameful.

His wife—the woman whose girlish innocence, whose child-like simplicity of mind, he had revered, in his own rough way—his wife alone with her lover in a strange town, the observed of unfriendly eyes, stealing back to London like a guilty creature.

'I cannot believe it,' he said to himself; 'I will show her the letter. I will hear what she has to say to the charge. Her own lips shall justify or condemn her.'

And then he remembered Barbara's curious antipathy to Maulford—a dislike which seemed so irrational, so unmerited by its object.

'Ask Maulford how they were together at Southampton,' said the letter. Maulford was indicated as the possessor of facts that condemned her.

Was it for this she disliked him?

'I will ask her what it all means,' Vyvyan said to himself again, staggered somewhat by this idea about Maulford. 'I will wring the truth from her somehow.'

Suddenly the letter dropped from his relaxing fingers, and he flung himself heavily on the sofa. It was the old feeling—the death-like torpor, the icy-sweat, the dimness of vision, the hideous sensation of sinking through the couch on which he lay; and this time the symptoms had a triple power, and he felt this must be death.

What did it mean? In this room—always in this room—at the same hour—at the same, or nearly the same, interval after his morning drink of beer.

Could disease be so mathematically periodic in its recurrence? observe the same hour? seize him always in the same spot?

'What if it were not disease, but poison?' he thought, with a dull horror creeping through his veins.

He was not wanted in the world. Indeed, knowing, as he knew, that George Leland was home from India—close at his door—he could hardly doubt that he was very much wanted out of the world. His wife had been sweet and gentle and tender in all her dealings with him. What of that? Women as soft-handed and as tender have been false as hell.

Didcott had told him that these symptoms meant heart-disease; but this proved nothing. Your doctor rarely finds out that his patient has been poisoned till after his death. He stands by and watches the case, and wonders a little, and has a general feeling that things are not going on pleasantly; and then by and by there is a post-mortem, and a scientific analyst finds traces of poison; and the family doctor says he had thought so, and the consulting physician deposes that there were grounds for grave suspicion, but that those grounds were not quite strong enough for a cautious medical man, with an eye to his practice, to proceed upon.

Poisoned! He remembered how Mark had been seized in exactly the same way, with precisely the same symptoms, in that room, after emptying yonder tankard—the honest old tankard, dented with service like a soldier's breastplate, which his father and grandfather had drunk out of before him; the tankard which, in more convivial times, had passed from hand to hand, as a loving-cup, after boisterous hunting dinners.

Poisoned! Yes, his strength had been slowly sapped, his nerves had been shattered by a mysterious malady. His heart had beaten with the steady jog-trot pace of old in the intervals of the disease; but when the fit seized him, in a moment the pulse grew slow and feeble, and the dull languor that was like death slackened the beating of the heart.

He was to be got rid of—not too suddenly, lest his death, being so convenient and happy an event for his widow, should give rise to suspicion. Some poison must be found which would simulate a mortal malady, and then, when the belief in that malady was established, the dose was to be made stronger, and the victim was to die.

Major Leland was near at hand, waiting for the end, ready to profit by it, in all likelihood the instigator of the crime.

He thought in gasps—disjointedly—his brain clouded by that dreadful lethargic heaviness which bound him to his sofa. Then, with a great effort, he raised himself on his elbow, and stretched out his hand to the bell. He was just able to reach it.

‘She shall know that I have found her out,’ he muttered; ‘I will not die like a poisoned rat in a hole—die, and make no sign.’

‘Send your mistress to me,’ he said to the butler, who appeared at the door.

‘Yes, sir. I beg your pardon, sir, are you ill?’

‘No. Send your mistress directly.’

Dickson retired, scared by his master’s ashy face and feeble tones. He found Barbara with Mrs. Trevornock in the morning-room, and delivered his message. Mrs. Penruth hurried to the study.

‘Vyvyan,’ she cried, seeing her husband lying on the sofa, prostrate, helpless, as he had lain that other day, ‘how white and faint you look! Let me give you some brandy.’

‘No, there would be death in it, perhaps. I want to ask you a question. Stand there, where I can see your face; there, facing the light. Great God, what purity and candour beam in your eyes! I have had a letter about you.’

‘A letter! From whom?’

‘From somebody who knew you before you were married. Tell me now, Mrs. Penruth, how far had matters gone with you and your lover before he went to India? I ought to have asked that question before I married you, ought I not? But you see I was a fool from the beginning; I trusted you blindly. You were with your lover at Southampton before he sailed?’

‘I went to see him on the day he sailed, to say good-bye to him.’

‘O, you went only on the day he sailed. You were not staying at Southampton with him?’

‘Vyvyan!’ she cried, with an indignant look.

'You ought not to be surprised at the question. A lady who goes alone to a strange town to see her lover, and is seen with him there, must expect to be suspected.'

'I see,' said Barbara, 'Mr. Maulford has told you. He saw me part from Captain Leland when the *Hesper* sailed; he put me into the train. Was it wrong to go and say good-bye to him on that last day, Vyvyan? If it was, I did not know it. He was my future husband, as I believed then, and we were to be parted for years. My mother and sister know how and when I went, how long I was away. You can question them, if you like.'

'You are a lovely piece of innocence,' gasped Vyvyan, succumbing again to that deadly faintness; 'and you have planned things cleverly for your lover and yourself. But perhaps even this last dose of poison was not quite strong enough, and I may survive it. Give me the brandy bottle—if—if that is not poisoned too.'

'Vyvyan, dear Vyvyan, your mind is wandering,' she said, filling a glass of brandy, and holding it to his lips with a shaking hand.

'Ah, your hand trembles; you are not altogether stone. You can poison a husband in cold blood, see him die by inches before your face, make believe to pity him; yet, when the end comes, you tremble.'

Frightened out of her senses, Barbara rang the bell with a desperate peal.

'Send for Mr. Didcott as fast as the groom can ride!' she said to the alarmed Dickson. 'Tell my mother—no, my sister—to come here directly. Not a word to Mrs. Trevornock.'

She knelt by her husband's side, and wiped the icy drops from his brow. Passion had given him a force that triumphed over his physical weakness; but this spurious strength was now exhausted, and he lay in a state of lethargy, heedless of what was passing round him. Barbara could only force a few drops of brandy between his livid lips. The pupils of his eyes were dilated, and the whole countenance had an awful look, which to Barbara, who had never seen death, seemed like death itself.

Flossie came running in breathless.

'What's the matter?' she asked.

'Vyvyan is ill—dreadfully ill. O Flossie, he has talked to me about my journey to Southampton as if it were a wicked act, as if I were a lost creature for going there. You—you can tell him that I only left you in the early morning, just to see George once more; that I was home with you again in the evening; that I had no thought of wrong-doing; no idea that any one could think evil of me for going.'

'Of course not,' cried Flossie sharply. 'Brother-in-law, you ought to be ashamed of yourself for going on in such a horrid

way. But, good gracious, how ill he looks ! too ill to understand me, poor creature ! What does it mean ?

‘I have seen him like this before, but the attack was not so bad. His mind has been wandering—he told me he was being poisoned ; said that I was poisoning him. O Flossie, Flossie, what shall I do ?’ cried Barbara, bursting into tears.

‘Do ? Why, send for a doctor. If we were in a civilised place, I should say send for a policeman.’

‘I have sent for the doctor. Miss Penruth ought to be told. Go and fetch her, Flossie. God help me, I haven’t a friend in the world !’

‘Fetch Miss Penruth, indeed !’ muttered Flossie, as she tore up to her own room. ‘Miss Penruth would have to be a great deal further off before I’d do it. No, I’ll fetch a man—a man with a heart and brains—who can tell that poor girl what she ought to do, and protect her against a madman ; for it looks as if my brother-in-law had gone clean out of his wits.’

Flossie always dressed quickly for her excursions on horse-back ; but to-day she put herself into her riding-gear with an amazing rapidity. The habit fitted well and easily, though it was made by a Camberwell tailor ; the cavalier hat was perched jauntily on the pretty head ; and Flossie ran down-stairs looking as neat and trim as if she had dressed in the most leisurely way. She had sent Gilmore to the stable to order Pepper to be ready in an instant, an order that could only be executed in a modified manner ; but the stablemen had done their best, for when she went into the yard she found one of them puffing and grumbling as he tugged at Pepper’s girths, protesting that ‘this yere ’oss do blow hisself out as if he had a blacksmith’s bellers inside him.’

‘You hain’t goin’ after doctor, be ye, miss ?’ said the man who mounted Flossie ; ‘becos Sanderson galloped off to Camelot on the black mare twenty minutes ago, and he’ll be half-way there by this time.’

‘No, Peter, I’m only going for a ride,’ Flossie answered innocently.

She jogged on at a sober pace so long as she was within sight of the stablemen, who had grouped themselves at the gate to watch her, with that remarkable interest in passing events which is only another name for idleness ; but when the curve of the road took her out of their view she gave the reins a shake, and Pepper a slash which sent him flying.

And when she was once on the moor, with the crisp hillocky turf under her horse’s hoofs, did not this young lady go ! Over hillock and hollow, heather and granite, went Pepper, like a horse with charmed legs, knuckling over and pulling himself up now and again with marvellous cleverness, and so on to a smooth stretch of turf beside the road, where Pepper went as evenly as a racer. Then a pause to breathe the horse, a little hand playing

pit-a-pat on his neck, an encouraging assurance that he was 'a good horse, a dear old Pepper'; and anon, while beguiled by these blandishments he was lapsing into a comfortable crawl, another rousing slash of the whalebone, and away again, up hill and down hill, over gorse and quagmire at a flying canter. And thus and thus, till they come to the edge of the moor above Rockport, and see the little harbour lying in the cleft of the cliffs below them, while Pepper scents the salt sea-breeze, and tosses his mane and paws the ground as if he were eager to be off again.

Flossie trots him briskly down the hill, which would be dangerously steep if the road did not wind corkscrew fashion down to the deep hollow where the little harbour nestles like a tiny world at the bottom of a pit, a mere dimple on the earth's surface, yet with its births and deaths, its wooing and marrying, its friendliness and its feuds, as complete in itself as if it were as big as the universe.

Here, face to face with a watermill, stands the homely comfortable Waterloo Inn, sheltered by steep green hills from every wind that blows; a blessed haven from the storms of life. How sweet a resting-place to the soldier, after forced marches under torrid skies, brief slumbers by the wayside, made restless by the howl of the jackal, the possibility of the cobra, watching and fasting and toil and danger!

All these were past, and George Leland lounged in the porch of the Waterloo Inn, smoking his cheroot and looking idly across the narrow harbour to the heathery ridge above, where the dark moor sloped off to unknown distances. He was roused from a gloomy reverie—the despondent survey of a world emptied of all delight—by the sharp click-clack of a horse's hoofs on the hard road, and on turning his eyes that way he perceived Flossie's blue riding-habit and the bulky form of the useful Pepper. He threw away his cigar, and hastened to meet the solitary Amazon.

'Were you coming to see me?' he exclaimed. 'How good of you! But how agitated you look! Is there anything wrong?'

'Tremendously wrong!' panted Flossie. 'That unfortunate brother-in-law of mine seems to have gone out of his mind. He was in a kind of fit when I came away, and he had been raving dreadfully—saying that he was poisoned, accusing Barbara. I want you to come with me. We are three helpless women, ma, Bab, and I, in that lonely house, without a friend; for I consider Miss Penruth an enemy, and I can't count Mark, for he's out all day, and of course, however good-natured he may be, he would go over to his brother's side in a family quarrel. So I want you to come: you will be some one on our side—a soldier, brave, determined, ready to fight for us. O Major Leland, *is* my sister to be accused of poisoning people?' gasped Flossie, in a tumult of indignation.

'By no one but a lunatic,' answered Leland wrathfully. 'I'll come as soon as I can get a horse saddled.'

There were post-horses at the Waterloo, and a couple of good hacks into the bargain, one of which carried the landlord, who was a welter-weight. This powerful brute George Leland helped to saddle, and he was mounted and ready to start in less than ten minutes. Then walking their horses up the hill, the better to cover the ground when they got to the top, the Major asked Flossie for further information as to the state of affairs at Place.

'Has Mr. Penruth ever treated your sister unkindly before to-day?' he asked.

'Never. He has been the best of husbands—a little grumpy, you know; but that's his way, and it is a grumpiness that does nobody harm. He is not a bit like that horrid sister of his, whose chief desire is to domineer over everybody, and to regulate us all as if she were Charles V., and we were so many clocks. Vyvyan has been kind to us all—I mean ma, Bab, and me. He gave me ten pounds to buy this very habit, when I was going back to Camberwell after our first visit, and when I had been wearing a hideous old-fashioned thing of Miss Penruth's which was so tight in the arm-holes as to be absolute torture, to say nothing of the sense of obligation, which was worse. No,' resumed Flossie, after this excursus; 'I don't believe he ever spoke unkindly to Barbara before this day, and I feel sure he must have gone clean out of his wits.'

'Did your sister tell you to come for me?' asked the Major, faltering a little.

'Not she! Bab never had a business-like idea in her life. Bab is the sort of person who in a great calamity would sit upon the ground, and cry, "Allah is good! Kismet!" or some nonsense of that kind. Was it not I who always had to tackle Mr. T.? and even now, in spite of the income Barbara allows us, I would get the Queen's taxes and poor-rates out of him if ma would let me. Barbara has not an idea that I have come for you. She told me to go and fetch Miss Penruth. I should like to have seen myself doing it! "I'd see her further first, and then I wouldn't,"' added Flossie, quoting the burlesque of *Conrad and Medora*, which was just now the rage in London.

They were at the top of the hill by this time.

'Now, Flossie,' said the Major, 'if you're sure of your seat and are not afraid of a hand-gallop, show me the way to Place.'

'All right,' answered the girl, bracing her bridle, and giving Pepper a smart lash on his shoulder. Away they went, as if they were riding a steeplechase, skimming cleverly over hillocky ground, plunging up to the horses' hocks through bog and slush; then spinning away swifter than ostriches across the good firm turf, here and there leaping a low furze-bush in the excitement

of the chase; and so to the open gates of the oak plantation, and on at a sharp trot to the house.

Here all was confusion. Vyvyan still lay in that awful death-like lethargy into which he had fallen when his passion had exhausted itself. He had been carried to his own room and laid upon his own bed, and the household had done what they could for him, but without avail. Mrs. Morris, as a person accustomed to sickness, had been called upon, Miss Penruth standing by and giving orders, but doing nothing. The messenger had returned from Camelot with the news that Mr. Didcott was from home, and likely to be away all day, as he had a difficult case at a farmhouse nine miles from the town, St. Columb way. The man had been despatched to Launceston straightway on a fresh horse, to get a doctor from that town, but there was no chance of his being back for the next hour.

In the absence of medical advice Mrs. Morris had taken upon herself to protest against brandy being given to the patient, although Barbara declared that it had cured him upon a previous occasion.

'Nothing worse than brandy where the head is affected,' said Mrs. Morris decidedly. 'Inflammatory.'

Miss Penruth, who had a natural bent to teetotalism, and looked upon all use of alcohol as intemperance, supported her confidential servant in this view of the case; so no brandy was administered to Vyvyan after those few drops which Barbara had forced between his lips. He lay like a log, the scared wife and sister watching him, the old butler in attendance, with the vague idea of doing something useful presently, and of all the group only Mrs. Morris self-possessed or capable. She sat by the bed as calmly as if she had been watching by a child's cradle while it slept the happy sleep of healthful infancy.

Barbara paced up and down the room—now wishing that the doctor were come, now wondering why Mark was not there—praying inwardly for help.

Upon this scene entered George Leland and Flossie, who had heard from the footman below the state of things upstairs.

'I hope you won't be angry with me,' said Flossie. 'I rode over to Rockport to fetch Major Leland; for I thought he would be able to advise you.'

Barbara turned to her lover with a look—first surprise mingled with fear, then ineffable confidence. He had come as her friend, her protector, her guide, her counsellor.

'O,' she cried piteously, 'help us if you can; my poor husband is dying, and no one knows what to do to save him. We have no doctor, and no one to advise.'

It was afternoon, and the westward-sloping sun was shining full into the room. George Leland looked round at all the faces

taking in every detail of the scene, every variety of expression in the actors, with a swift scrutiny. He was a man accustomed to emergencies, skilled in reading character, a man who had led a hard life and seen strange things and strange people. He had been judge and jury, prosecutor and advocate, in the days of his Indian commissionership. He had dealt largely with cheats and rascals, and he knew the seamy side of human nature as well as any one.

He read the story of those faces. Miss Penruth fretful, sanctimonious, inclined to be malignant. The old butler a model of faithful imbecility. These were as easy to read as the big letters in a baby's alphabet. But here was a countenance whose meaning was printed in a different type, and needed a longer scrutiny; this calm hard face framed in a widow's cap, these bugle-bright black eyes which shifted nervously as they looked at him, these thin cruel lips closed as tight as metal springs, yet agitated by a nervous quivering for a moment or two while he watched the face.

'Tell me what is the matter, Mrs. Penruth,' he said gently, going up to the bedside, where his rival lay motionless, seemingly senseless. 'Tell me all you can. I am half a doctor; for it was my luck to see a good deal of sickness at the infirmary where I had temporary quarters while I was superintending the building of a new hospital, to say nothing of my experience on long marches, when I have had to be surgeon as well as captain.'

Barbara, trembling a little, told him as much as she knew of the symptoms of the case; told him how she had seen her husband affected months ago in a similar manner, but less violently; how a glass of brandy had then revived him.

'Indeed! And you have been giving him brandy now, I suppose?'

'No,' said Barbara; 'Mrs. Morris thought it wiser not.'

'Give me the bottle, please,' said the Major, with an observant look at the widow, who was a shade paler than when he entered the room. 'Your experience should have prevailed over Mrs. Morris's wisdom, Mrs. Penruth.'

With the help of Dickson, who was adipose and jelly-fish-like in build, but who had a heart of gold, Major Leland contrived to force half a tumbler of brandy down Vyvyan's throat. Then he looked at his eyes, saw the unnatural dilatation of the pupil, felt his pulse, heart, the temperature of his skin, noted the swollen lips.

'I have seen just such symptoms in a case of snake-bite,' he said. 'Have you any ammonia in the house?'

Miss Penruth's mind had been curiously divided between a sense of relief in the fact that some one had come to her brother's assistance and intense indignation at his impertinence in coming. She now opened her lips for the first time since Major Leland's

entrance, and in somewise relaxed the stony stare with which she had been regarding him.

'I think I have a little,' she said, 'in my dressing-case. Go and fetch it, Morris,—a small stoppered bottle, labelled sal volatile.'

The inestimable Morris obeyed, moving slowly and rigidly, as if she had been a mechanical figure.

CHAPTER XXXV.

'WHY SHOULD I THANK HIM?'

'FLOSSIE tells me that Mr. Penruth talked about being poisoned,' said George Leland, in a low voice to Barbara, while Mrs. Morris was gone to fetch the ammonia. 'Is that true?'

'Yes; he said he had been poisoned—he talked wildly about poison.'

'I am hardly surprised, for the symptoms look terribly like that, and nothing else.'

'Good Heavens!' cried Barbara; 'but who could give him poison? How could poison come in his way?'

'Accidentally, perhaps. One can never tell. You cannot do wrong in giving him powerful stimulants. It looks like a case of narcotic poison. I saw exactly these symptoms—the same look in the eyes, the same lethargy—in a man who was being treated for heart-disease in the infirmary I was telling you about. The surgeon had given him gentle doses of an infusion of digitalis—foxglove, you know—as a sedative; and one night the fellow had an attack of palpitation, and, believing that if a little of the stuff gave him a little relief, a good deal of it would cure him altogether, he got up while every one in the ward was asleep, and emptied the bottle. He was pretty near death, I can tell you; and it was only by dosing him with ammonia and strong coffee that the doctor brought him round.'

'And you think Vyvyan has been taking some preparation of foxglove?' said Barbara, standing by the bed, chafing her husband's icy hands, while Miss Penruth stood on the opposite side, listening intently.

Mrs. Morris came in at this moment, followed closely by Mark, who hurried into the room in an agitated manner, whip in hand, having jumped off his horse a minute ago, and rushed straight from the stable-yard.

'Is he better?' he cried.

'He is still living,' answered Priscilla. 'We must be thankful for that. This gentleman, an old friend of Mrs. Penruth's, is trying to render us assistance in the absence of any doctor.'

'Has no doctor come?'

'Not yet. Mr. Didcott was away.'

'Yes, William told me. You have sent to Launceston, I suppose?'

'Yes; the messenger ought to be back by this time. O, dear, dear!' exclaimed Priscilla, watching Major Leland, who, with Barbara's help, was administering a dose of ammonia, 'I trust in God we are doing what is right. O Major Leland, you are not tampering with that precious life? you are sure that this is proper treatment?'

'I am doing what I would do if Mr. Penruth were my own father,' answered Leland; 'I should act in exactly the same manner if his life were of all lives the most precious to me.'

'How long has he been like this?' asked Mark, looking down at his brother.

'Since twelve o'clock. It was a sudden seizure. Mrs. Penruth was with him.'

'It is his heart that is affected,' said Mark, looking at Major Leland. 'For mercy's sake don't try to doctor him unless you know all about heart-disease!'

'This is no heart-disease,' answered Leland. 'Your brother is suffering from the effect of some powerful narcotic poison.'

'Poison!' cried Mark. 'How should he be poisoned?'

'It is for you and Mrs. Penruth to find out that.'

'But he has suffered from such attacks—not so bad as this; but the same kind of thing—for the last three months. The doctor examined him, and told him that his heart was out of order. The complaint is hereditary. My father dropped down dead. I have had the same kind of attack.'

'Then I think you must have taken the same kind of poison.'

Mark stared at him with a ghastly face, remembering that draught of beer out of his brother's tankard, and how it was only on that one occasion he had been attacked by his brother's malady.

'Great God!' he cried, 'if this is true, there must be some devil in the house!'

He looked round among the assembled faces, aghast with horror—looked in vacant wonder, till one face amidst them all, standing vividly out from the rest, as if the dark secrets of the soul behind it were written upon it in characters of fire, riveted his gaze.

Which of all those faces looked like a devil's? This one, most surely; this rigid countenance lit by the serpent's glittering eyes, with the cruel downward curve of the serpent's venomous mouth; this face which had once seemed so fair in Mark Penruth's sight, a face to peril fortune for; this face set off and garnished by the widow's cap, the sleek banded hair; this bloodless countenance in which the livid hue of the cheeks

seemed more unnatural because of the one central spot of hectic which burned on each, like the print of a Satanic kiss.

Mark staggered to his brother's bedside, and flung himself down against the pillows, interposing his body between Vyvyan's motionless figure and all the rest of the world. For some moments he remained thus, speechless, leaning against his brother, as a dog might have done, with something of a dog's fidelity; and as he hung over the sick man thus, old memories of boyish days came back to him; the time when he had revered and admired Vyvyan as the tall grown-up brother—a young man while Mark was still a child; the day when Vyvyan had mounted him on a rat of an Exmoor pony and taken him for his first ride, with a leading-rein. Many a brotherly kindness, many an act of love flashed across Mark's memory as he leant upon his brother's bed in the fast darkening room.

'If there has been foul play,' he muttered hoarsely, 'I will not spare the poisoner. No; I will not spare!'

The powerful stimulants were beginning to take effect. The patient stirred and moaned in his sleep.

They watched him thus for a long and anxious hour, watched and waited in silence, while George Leland administered brandy or ammonia from time to time, and kept Mrs. Morris hard at work heating flannels and filling hot-water bottles to be applied to the patient's feet. The sluggish heart began to move a little more naturally, the cold sweat cleared off the pale fixed face, the swollen lips lost something of their livid hue, and a faint tinge of red came back to the hollow cheeks.

'I believe he will live through it,' said George Leland at last.

'Could not an emetic have been given him?' asked Mark.

'Yes, if any one had thought of it when the attack began; but after three or four hours it would be fatal. I remember what the surgeon at our infirmary said about it. I am simply copying his treatment. He saved his man, and, please God, we shall save ours.'

'You are a good fellow,' said Mark.

'I am Mrs. Penruth's faithful friend,' answered Leland; 'that is my highest merit.'

After this there was silence for some time, Mark not stirring from his post at his brother's side, Barbara sitting close by, George Leland standing at the foot of the bed. On the other side sat Miss Penruth and Mrs. Morris, the former seeking consolation alternately from an open book of *Precious Balms for Broken Spirits*, by an unknown Colonial bishop, and a silver vinaigrette. Flossie was with her mother in Barbara's dressing-room, the door of communication being open, to allow of the younger lady peeping in every five minutes or so, and asking in a whisper of nobody in particular,

'Is he getting better?'

He was so much better presently that he turned on his pillow, opened his eyes, and recognised his brother.

'What, Mark, old fellow, is that you?'

'Yes, Vyvyan. Thank God, you know me.'

Vyvyan tried to raise himself; but the effort brought on intense giddiness.

'No,' he muttered; 'I must lie here like a log, lie here till I die.'

He took no notice of Major Leland, whose tall figure was partly hidden by the curtain. His dull eyes took heed of no one but his brother, whose arm he could feel round him.

Just at this moment the Launceston doctor entered—a middle-aged man, bald, spectacled, with a sagacious highly-polished brow, and a comfortable manner, soothing as a sedative.

To him Barbara turned with delight.

'Thank Heaven, you have come!' she said. 'This gentleman, Major Leland, has been helping us in our dreadful difficulty. He will tell you what he has done—what he thinks—'

'My dear lady, do not distress yourself,' said the doctor, looking round at the assembled multitude. 'The first thing will be to get the room cleared of everybody except yourself; and Major—er—Selim,' he added, making a dash at the name, 'who will kindly inform me what he has been doing.'

Mark turned from his brother's bed with a reluctant air, and walked slowly towards the door, looking curiously at Mrs. Morris as he passed her, like a man who has some fearful thought half-shaped in his brain.

Miss Penruth retired to the dressing-room where Flossie and her mother were waiting; but she did not go without a protest.

'Nobody can be more interested in my brother's health than I am,' she said; 'not even his wife; certainly not a stranger, however obliging.'

'My dear madam, I am aware how trying such an occasion must be for you, as well as for Mrs. Penruth; but quiet is indispensable. You may be within call. You shall have immediate information of any change in our patient.'

With these reassuring words the strange doctor, who seemed as much at home as if he had brought a generation or two of Penruths into the world, led Priscilla to the dressing-room, and dismissed her with a bland smile. Mrs. Morris had silently retired by the door leading into the gallery.

Then, having closed the door carefully, Mr. Fordyce, the Launceston doctor, came quietly back to the bedside, and proceeded to examine his patient. Consciousness had in some degree returned. Vyvyan looked full at the stranger with glassy eyes, the pupils still unnaturally dilated.

'Mr. Penruth was seized with this disorder soon after noon to-day, I understand?' said Mr. Fordyce.

'Yes,' answered Barbara. 'He has had the same kind of

illness before, but not with such violence. To-day he told me that he believed he was poisoned. When he said this I thought his mind was affected; but Major Leland, who came over from Rockport to help us in our distress, thinks that my husband's illness is really caused by poison.'

'Pray, sir, may I ask what ground you have for such an opinion?' Mr. Fordyce inquired coolly, as he went on with his examination of the patient.

'Simply that I have seen a case of narcotic poisoning in which the symptoms were precisely similar. I have applied the same remedies I saw used in that case, and with the same happy effect. When I came here two hours ago, Mr. Penruth was in a death-like stupor, his pulse hardly perceptible.'

'So you are Major Leland?' said Vyvyan, turning his haggard face towards the soldier.

'What was the nature of the poison in the case you speak of?' asked the doctor.

'Digitalis,' replied Leland; and then he went on to describe the case at the Indian hospital.

Mr. Fordyce listened; but did not commit himself to an opinion, save to express mild approval of the Major's treatment.

'You could hardly have done better under the circumstances,' he said. 'Your remedies were judicious, and safe.'

'And you find Mr. Penruth's pulse recovering its vitality, I hope?'

'Yes, there is a return of vitality; slow, but palpable.'

'Then I cannot do better than leave him in such good hands,' said Leland quietly. 'Good-night, Mrs. Penruth.'

Vyvyan, exclaimed Barbara piteously, seeing her husband's eyes fixed on George Leland with a wrathful look even in their glassy vacancy, 'won't you speak to Major Leland before he goes? Won't you give him one good word for saving your life?'

'Why should I thank him for so questionable a boon?' asked Vyvyan, with faint slow speech. 'It might have been better to let me go. Somebody must have wanted me out of the world very badly.'

'I desire no thanks,' answered Leland. 'I did what I would have done for any *sowar* in my company; no more than I have done for many a cholera-smitten wretch by the wayside. Good-night, Mrs. Penruth.'

Barbara followed him to the door.

'Don't go away,' she pleaded; 'I feel as if we were all safer while you are here. This strange doctor will not stay long, perhaps, and then we shall be alone and helpless again. If Vyvyan has been poisoned, as you think, and as he thinks, there must be a hidden enemy in this house.'

'I believe there is,' said Leland. 'What do you know of that widow, your sister-in-law's maid?'

'Nothing, except that Miss Penruth has a high opinion of her.'

'I have just the opposite idea. And I believe your brother-in-law is of the same way of thinking. I saw him look at her curiously just now.'

'I am full of fears,' said Barbara. 'You will stay, won't you?'

'If you bid me stay, yes. What have I to live for so sweet as to be useful to you?'

'Go down to the drawing-room. I will send my mother and Flossie to take care of you. I shall not leave this room.'

'You are right. Your place is here.'

Barbara went back to the bedside.

'A very sensible person that Major Elam,' said Mr. Fordyce. 'His remedies are perfectly unobjectionable; in fact so much so, that I shall pursue the same treatment myself, with certain amplifications. You have a nurse, I presume—some trusty old servant who can carry out my instructions?'

'I will be my husband's only nurse, if you please,' answered Barbara firmly. 'I am quite able to do anything you require done.'

'But you are so young and inexperienced.'

'That is nothing. I have a mind that can learn, I hope; and I will obey your instructions most faithfully.'

'Very well, my dear young lady, I will not refuse to indulge so natural a desire. I shall not leave Mr. Penruth while his condition is critical. And now tell me, dear madam have you any idea of any possible manner in which your husband can have accidentally taken poison? Do you know of any poisonous medicine having been in the house?'

'No, indeed. There has been no medicine sent for any one since my husband's recovery from a cold and low fever, during which Mr. Didcott attended him.'

'Well, perhaps it may be better to reserve all speculation upon this subject till I see Mr. Didcott. It would be well if Didcott could be here before I leave. Your groom said he was expected to return to his house at Camelot early in the evening. Would it be too much to ask that a messenger might be sent to request him to drive over here at whatever hour he may return?'

'It shall be done,' said Barbara, ringing the bell.

She gave the order to Gilmore, who promised to go herself to the stable and give the message to the right man. Mr. Penruth's dogcart was to be sent over to Camelot, and was to wait there till the surgeon could be brought back.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

LINKS IN THE CHAIN.

MARK went slowly down-stairs through the gathering dusk, scarce knowing where he went, or why he chose one direction

more than another. Mrs. Morris had vanished in the darkness of the up-stairs gallery, whether to Priscilla's room or her own Mark knew not. In the hall below all was dusk and silence. The servants, reassured by the coming of the doctor, were at tea in the distant kitchen. The lamps were not yet lighted.

The study-door stood open, and the red firelight within had a cosy look, or would have had to a man disposed to see the comfortable side of things; but for Mark at this moment life was steeped in densest gloom. He felt weighed down beneath such a burden of dread and terror as he had never till now been called upon to bear. The fears that had harassed him when his accounts at the quarries were all wrong, and he lived in hourly dread of detection, were as nothing compared with this awful apprehension of to-day.

Poison: that is to say, secret murder in its basest, most insidious form. Some one, in this honest old house, under the roof-tree that had covered generations of God-fearing single-minded men and women, had been plotting against the master's life, sapping his strength, crushing his spirits, imbuing him with the ever-present fear of sudden death, preparing by slow and gradual measures for the final stroke which was to consummate a murder.

Who was that secret plotter? Who had most interest in making a speedy end of Vyvyan's life? Was it the fair young wife, whose old lover had come back, with fame and honour, ready to pick up the dropped thread of a broken love-story? Surely there could be no one else more likely to desire Vyvyan's death, no one who could profit more; for what can be greater gain than to go back to one's first true love, and be happy?

Mark would willingly have persuaded himself that Barbara was the guilty one; but he could not. The sweet face, in all its tender beauty, rose before his eye, the face he had seen hanging over his brother's bed, like an angel's, full of pity. No; to plot murder and look thus must be beyond the power of humanity. Dissimulation may go far, but not to such a point as this. And there had been that other face by the same bed, a face once passing fair in his sight, but where now he saw the brand of Cain.

And he remembered with infinite horror that night in the cottage on the St. Columb road, when Lewis Maulford had discussed the younger brother's chances of inheriting the estate, how those shrewd black eyes had glittered with the rapture of a greedy soul that foresees the accomplishment of its desire, and how the wife of his bosom had cried, 'If Vyvyan were to die; if he were to fall down in a fit!'

The thought of death had been there—thought and desire too. And then swift on the heels of this knowledge, acquired from Maulford, had come Molly's ardent wish to be domesticated

at Place ; that scheme of hers which had seemed to Mark so foolish and motiveless, but to which his weaker nature had yielded, as it yielded always to her persuasive tongue, her kindling eyes, her superior power of argument, which went so far as to make the most illogical reasoning appear logical and sound. He had yielded, angry with himself for yielding. He had brought his low-born wife into his brother's house, disguised, falsified, with a false character. He had done this thing believing that he was indulging a woman in a foolish whim, the gratification of which could do no serious harm to anybody ; though it was likely to inflict inconvenience, possibly discredit, upon himself. And now all his senses were paralysed by the horrible fear that this seeming caprice was part of a deadly plan ; that Molly had crossed the threshold with the deliberate intent of shortening his brother's days.

He went into the fire-lit study, and shut the door, and sat down on his brother's sofa, which had been wheeled to the fireside, and thought of all those facts in the past and present which made the links in the chain of evidence by which his wife was to be judged. He remembered her greed of gain ; how she had always harped upon and built upon his chances of succeeding to his brother's estate ; with what malignant envy she had always regarded Barbara ; how arrogantly she had asserted her own claim, as the mother of three brawny boys, against that childless wife. He considered how unlike her natural disposition it was to wish to lower herself to menial offices ; she, who had looked back at her days of service with such contemptuous self-pity, and had boasted that with the Lanhernes she had been more like the mistress than the servant. Yet to gratify this fancy of hers, with no stronger motive than a vague idea of acquiring an influence over Vyvyan, she had borne with the caprices and petty tyrannies of a most exacting mistress, she had subjugated her own nature, repressed every feeling, separated herself for more than half a year from her children, left house and home, belied every attribute of her mind, and to all seeming was no nearer achieving her alleged purpose than she had been the day she first entered the house.

And then Mark recollected that the change in his brother's health had only come about after Molly had been domiciled at Place. Until this year there had been no man in Cornwall hardier or stronger than Vyvyan. But within three months of Mrs. Morris's advent the insidious malady had begun, and the man's whole constitution had changed.

He remembered how he had been attacked in precisely the same manner after emptying his brother's tankard of home-brewed beer. And this attack had not recurred ; there was nothing in the beat of his heart to-night, even under the agitation of this horrible fear, to indicate weakness or disease.

Could he doubt that the cause had been in the draught? that the beer, brewed after the same recipe for a century and more, had been drugged?

There was the tankard, left on the table after his brother had taken his last draught out of it—the draught of triple strength which had been intended to despatch him; for the murderer, having prepared every one for the end, and hoodwinked the doctor, had no motive for delaying the final stroke any longer. Mark rose and took up the tankard, and lifted the lid to see if there was any of the beer left. Yes, there was about a tablespoonful of liquor at the bottom of the vessel—just enough for analysis, he fancied, knowing very little about such things.

‘If it is she who has done this thing, I will do nothing to help in hiding her guilt,’ he said to himself; ‘I will not try to shield or to save her. No, though she is my wife, and the mother of my children, I will remember nothing except that she came into my brother’s house by stealth, and tried to murder him. Thank God, she has failed: yes, though I were to be a beggar and an outcast for the rest of my life, I can thank God with all my heart that this iniquitous plot has failed.’

He flung himself down upon the sofa, and drew Vyvyan’s fur carriage-rug over his shoulders. He lay thus with his eyes closed, not inclined to sleep, but worn out with the agitations of the afternoon, and the turmoil of soul he had suffered since the groom rushed into his office at the quarries to tell him that his brother was dying, and that he must ride his hardest home if he wanted to see him again before he died.

Lying thus, with the fur rug flung over him, Mark’s figure was only faintly discernible in the fire-lit room; not visible at all to the person who crept in presently, with stealthy foot and cautious movements, and stole slowly towards the table where the silver tankard glimmered amidst a confusion of papers, hunting-whips, and hats.

Mark lay with his back to this table, and his face towards a bookcase opposite, an old-fashioned bookcase, with a glass door above and drawers below, a bookcase of the period when the average gentleman’s library could be shut up in a very small space, and was apt to be kept, like stuffed birds or geological specimens, behind perpetual glass.

The firelight was shining on the glass door, making it almost as good a reflecting surface as if it had been a mirror, and this reflecting surface showed Mark Penruth the figure of his wife bending over the table, peering into the open tankard.

She moved suddenly towards the fireplace with the tankard in her hand. He guessed that she was going to throw the dregs of the draught into the grate, and sprang up from his sofa to stop her.

Startled by his sudden appearance in a room she had believed

empty, Molly drew back with a stifled scream, and let him take the tankard from her hand ; but, recovering her self-possession in the next instant, she tried to get it from him.

'What do you want with it?' she asked. 'I was sent here. I am going to take it to Dickson.'

'Dickson can do without it for a few hours. I am going to put this tankard under lock and key.'

CHAPTER XXXVII.

ON A DARK ROAD.

MARK opened a door in the panelling near the fireplace, where there was roomy closet in which the Squire kept the accumulated rubbish of years—horseballs and old newspapers, discarded bits and bridles, damaged whips, rusty spurs. Here on a shelf Mark set the silver tankard, and then shut and locked the door upon it, and put the key in his pocket.

'What have you done that for?' asked his wife, confronting him, hideous as a baffled fury, her pallid lips working convulsively, every feature distorted with passion.

That he should rise up against her, this easy-tempered husband, whom she had managed, and bullied, and worked her own will with, during all the years of their married life, was a crushing blow. To meet resistance from so weak a thing was maddening.

'Because my brother has been poisoned, and there may be some trace of the poison in that tankard. I had a drink out of it once, and I know how I felt after that drink.'

'Are you out of your senses as well as the rest of them?' exclaimed Molly contemptuously. 'Your brother is dying of heart-disease. Mr. Didcott knows that. And because he gets delirious and talks about poison, and his wife's lover comes here to echo the cry—more shame to her for inviting him here at such a time—you must take it into your head to be mighty clever and take up the same story. I've no patience with such idiocy.'

'Come,' said Mark, with a look and manner she had never seen in him before—the look of a man who can be master when his time comes—'don't let us bandy words. I have found you out, woman, and I have done with you. I never knew what it was to be sick or sorry till the evil day you got hold of me. I've never been a happy man since I've known you. But it's all over and done with now. You and I are parted ; and if you ever try to set up any claim upon me, I'll do my best to put a rope round your neck.'

'You are a fool !' cried Molly, looking at him with eyes that once had power to make him shiver, but whose angry fire he could defy now he knew the devil's nature that sparkled in them.

'No, I have been an arrant fool, but my eyes are opened. I have sat alone in this room for the last hour, thinking over your wickedness. O you devil! To steal into my brother's house, and try to take his life; so that you might come here and sit in his wife's place, and sleep—you would have slept peacefully, I suppose—in the bed where he now lies at death's door. Come, why should I waste words on you? I know you. That's enough. Come with me.'

'Where?'

'To the hall-door. You have finished your business here, and you've made a mess of it. Please God, my poor brother will live through to-night, and be sound and hale again before he's a month older.'

'You are not going to turn me out of doors, Mark?'

'That is just what I am going to do. You ought to think yourself lucky if you get off scot-free, and go and hide your wicked head in another county.'

This meant, in Mark's idea, remotest exile. A man who left Cornwall was, as it were, at the Antipodes.

'You would turn me out of doors after dark, to lose myself on the moor?'

'You'll find the road easily enough. Perhaps it might be the best thing for yourself and others if you were to get lost. If you stay here much longer you may have the constables taking you off to Launceston jail.'

'Who would dare to accuse me?' asked Molly boldly.

'Facts! Facts which speak pretty plain in this case.'

'What facts? Who can say that I ever tampered with poison? Who can show that I ever bought poison?'

'No need to buy the poison that grows in all our hedges. A few young foxglove leaves were all you wanted for your work. Will you go quietly, or shall I tell Dickson to put you out, or send one of the men for a constable?'

'Do you mean it? Do you mean that you can stand there, and in cold blood accuse your wife—your honest wedded wife—of being—' The white lips faltered. Audacity was this woman's strong point, but there was a limit even to her daring.

'A secret poisoner. Yes, that is what I know you to be.'

'If any one has tried to poison your brother, it must be his wife. She wants to get rid of him, that she may go back to her old sweetheart. That ought to be clear enough even to a fool like you. Didn't I see those two plotting together a month ago, and isn't he here now to see how their plot works? Easy enough for him to find out what the poison was, when it was he and she that gave it. I suppose he means to give an extra dose presently, under pretence of curing your brother. It's a deep-laid scheme, Mark; but if you weren't a fool you'd see through it as easy as I can.'

'Are you going, or shall I send for the constable?'

'I am going. If I drop down dead on the way, my death shall lie at your door.'

'Your life has lain at my door, and has been a heavy load for me to bear.'

'You would not shed a tear, I suppose, if you were to hear of my death?'

'Not one. I should thank God for having removed a monster from the earth.'

'My children!' she cried, turning upon him suddenly like a tigress. 'My three bonny boys! What is to become of them?'

'They will be taken care of; you need have no fear for them; they have done no wrong.'

She made no further remonstrance, but watched his face closely as they went across the hall in the lamplight. If she had seen any sign of wavering there, in the face she knew so well, she would have stood her ground and defied this husband of hers, and brazened out the situation to the very end. But she saw in this familiar countenance an unfamiliar look that paralysed her and made her submissive to her own degradation, a look that meant indomitable will. For once in his life Mark's manhood asserted itself, and he was master.

'Do you mean that you and me are to part for ever like this?' she asked, turning round and facing him on the threshold.

'God grant I may never see your face again!'

'Will you let me run up-stairs to my room for a shawl or a cloak? I shall be frozen to death out on the moor.'

'I won't trust you out of my sight. You will be creeping into my brother's room and giving him another dose. His life is not safe while you are in the house.'

'You are on a false scent, as I told you just now,' she said; 'but it's no use arguing with a madman, I suppose. I am not going out on the moor to perish with cold. You can go up-stairs with me if you like, and wait outside my door while I get my shawl.'

He did not wish her to die of cold, any more than he wished her to die on the gallows. He only wanted to get rid of her out of his own life and his brother's, to make a swift end of her as a source of danger and woe. So he just grunted an ungracious assent; and they went up the back staircase together, to that modest apartment roofed diagonally by a picturesque gable, which had been considered good enough for Miss Penruth's maid,

'Don't be long,' said Mark, as she went into the room.

She was not long. She had made up her mind what she had to do, and did it quickly. She flew to the clumsy old chest of drawers in a corner of the room, unlocked a drawer, and took out a large bottle of brownish-coloured liquid, labelled *Rosemary Hair wash*. She ran to the lattice, opened it, and emptied

the contents of the bottle over the ivy which grew thickly up to the window-sill. Then she took a small flat brown-paper parcel from the same drawer, and thrust it into her bosom.

These were all the instruments of a rural Borgia. No casket with spring lock, no retorts, or crucibles, or furnaces, or glass masks, or automatic death-dealing rings had been necessary to her trade. A bunch of leaves and flowers out of the hedges had been all she needed for secret murder.

She snatched a warm jacket from a peg, put on her close widow's bonnet, and rejoined Mark on the landing.

He led the way down-stairs without a word, she meekly following, till they came to the hall-door. Here Mark stopped to get a coat and hat from the adjacent room where such things were kept.

'I am going as far as the gate with you,' he said grimly. 'I want to see you clear of the premises.'

It was a fine wintry night, planets and constellations shining in the clear cold sky, the moan of distant waves making melancholy music.

Husband and wife walked side by side along the broad gravel road, side by side in unbroken silence, till they came to the lodge. The gates had been shut at dusk, and the lodge-keeper came out to open them, and looked wonderingly at the widow and her companion.

'Good-night,' said Molly, with a last malignant look, when the gate was opened.

'Good-night,' answered her husband; and so they parted, she walking briskly away on the high-road.

'You know that person?' Mark said to the lodge-keeper, when Mrs. Morris's black figure was lost in night and distance.

'Yes, sir; I d' know she well enow. 'Tis Miss Penruth's maid.'

'Miss Penruth has dismissed her. You are not to admit her on any pretence whatever.'

'No, sir, surely. But if she d' come i' the daytime when the gate's open, she'd have nowt to do but walk straight through.'

'You have eyes to see her in the daytime. If she come to this gate, stop her. She has no right on my brother's land. Give her in charge as a trespasser.'

'Has she been stayling, Mr. Mark, a respectable-lookin' widow like that?'

'Never mind what she has been doing. All you have to do is to keep her off the premises.'

The man shrugged his shoulders and shook his head significantly, as if imagination made up to him in some way for his ignorance of actual fact.

Molly went her way over the moor, a desperate creature, full to the brim of evil passions and evil wishes; hating every one in the old house yonder, whose lighted windows made but the

faintest glimmer in the distance, when she stopped upon her lonely road for a minute to hug her jacket closer to her chest, and to look back at the paradise from which she had been expelled.

She had made her attempt to win house and fortune for herself and her children, bringing all her cleverness to bear, plotting and planning with a cool brain, carrying out her work with an unflinching hand, patiently, doggedly proceeding on her dark road, till the goal seemed close ; and then, swift as a flash, had come failure and discovery.

She had known from the moment that Indian soldier entered the room that her chance was lost. She had felt, rather than seen, his eyes reading her face, and the secrets of her soul written there. She hated him almost as intensely as she hated her weak husband, who had found a will of his own just at the very crisis when it was vital to her that he should be blindly submissive.

‘I could have held my ground but for Mark’s interference,’ she thought ; ‘ so long as no one in that house knew who I was, no one had any reason for suspecting me. But with that prating fool against me, I should be ruined. And now what is to become of me, I wonder ? What have I got to care about, or to live for ?’

And then, tramping steadily along the lonely moorland road, where you might walk for an hour without meeting a mortal, this woman set herself to argue that question which dilettante philosophers lounging in Jacobean drawing-rooms, made beautiful by blue-and-white crockery on sage-green walls, have lately asked mankind to consider,—is life worth living ? What was it worth to this baffled plotter, who had lost the prize for which she had ventured so deep, and who saw nothing in all her days to come but disappointment and disgrace ? Conscience had no terrors for her, remorse no sting ; in her case the worm and the fire were in the sense of failure ; to have gone so far and succeeded so well, and yet to have failed at last.

She saw no hope in the future, even if she could clear herself in Mark’s sight, and convince him that she was innocent of the crime with which he had charged her, and win him back again as a yielding and indulgent husband. What, then, even if this were possible, which seemed unlikely ? What then ? Mark could not give her Place, or any part of the wealth that went along with it. Were he to declare his marriage he would be a beggar. He had told her as much many a time ; and now that she had lived under Vyvyan’s roof she was more inclined to believe in her husband’s view of the Squire’s character. He was a hard man ; a man not to be moved from his opinions or his prejudices ; capable of generosity, but with an incapacity to pardon. And if Mark kept the secret of his low marriage, and the thread of life were to be taken up again just where it had been dropped at the cottage on the St. Columb

road?—a decent life enough, surely, for a vagabond seaman's daughter, a woman who had begun her career in a low public-house at Devonport, and for whom the bar at the King's Arms, and the decent dulness of Camelot, had been promotion. But for Molly such a life did not seem worth living. She had looked forward to something much better than this in those summer evenings when she and Mark Penruth walked in the lanes near Camelot, and her heart swelled with pride at the thought of her gentleman lover's subjugation. When she married him, she had in her own mind made herself the future mistress of Place. Vyvyan was a confirmed bachelor, whose solitary life and eccentric habits made him appear much older than he was. Vyvyan would be brought to forgive his brother's foolish marriage—Molly had an overweening belief in her power over the sterner sex—and would open the doors of Place to the bride; and all would go merrily till the kind elder brother made a peaceful and timely end, and left Mark and Mary to reign in his stead.

This had been Molly's vision of the future when the Squire's brother married her. She unfolded her views to Mark one summer evening as they strolled on the little sea-walk at Sidmouth, at which bewilderingly lively watering-place they spent their brief honeymoon. Mark's very different manner of looking at things dashed her a little; but she set down his prognostications to stupidity and cowardice.

'I don't think I'd have married you if I'd have known you were such a poor timid creature,' she said. 'It's all very well to keep things secret for a little while, and watch your opportunity; but you can't suppose I'm going to be hid away in holes and corners for ever.'

This was, perhaps, an allusion to certain arrangements which Mark had been suggesting. He was afraid of taking his young wife too near home, and had planned a lodging in a back street in Plymouth, where he might visit her by stealth.

Molly endured the back street in Plymouth and the rarity of her husband's visits for a twelvemonth; but at the end of that time she was the mother of a bouncing boy-baby, and had acquired complete ascendancy over the boy's father. She insisted upon his finding her a home of her own—a home in which she would have her own furniture and her own servant, instead of being dependent on the scanty service and the scantier furniture of a third-rate lodging. She insisted, further, that the home should be within easy reach of Mark's office, so that he might devote his leisure to the cultivation of domestic affections, and see more of the magnificent boy-baby, and future inheritor of Place. Mark, after resisting as he always resisted, yielded as he always yielded, and the cottage on the St. Columb road happening, just at this time, to stand empty, seemed to offer a golden opportunity for establishing Mrs. Mark in a home of her own:

provided always that she would keep the promise she made before her marriage, and reveal to no living creature that she was Mark's wife, until he himself should be prepared to admit the fact and stand by what he had done. Molly had been ready enough to make this promise when the chance of her marriage depended on her readiness so to pledge herself.

The cottage was furnished with goods and chattels chosen by Mary herself, and, for the first year or so, the pleasure of possessing these chairs and tables, fenders and fire-irons, with the labour of keeping the same spotless and shining, satisfied the longings, and even the ambition, of the so-called Mrs. Peters. The vision of future glory at Place was always before her. The cottage was but the purgatory which was to precede that paradise; but, for a time, the purgatorial existence was not unendurable. Then came the weariness of monotony: the chairs and tables, fenders and fire-irons, were always exactly the same, polish and scrub as she might; and then there was the galling sense that the very people who admired her furniture and drank her tea secretly looked down upon her, as a spurious kind of matron, who could give only a garbled account of herself, and had never been known to show her marriage-lines, even to a bosom friend. And out of this weariness and sense of shame there grew an ardent longing to be 'righted,' to have all the praise and glory that was her due as a respectable married woman, whose 'prudence' none could question. Then, when she had borne this dull slow life for nearly ten years, growing more bitter of tongue and snappish of temper every year, came the news of Vyryan's marriage, to overthrow all her hopes of future greatness. And there and then those seven devils, which lie in wait to take possession of empty houses whence all the virtues and the graces have fled, came and made their abode with Mark's wife, and the vilest thought that ever took shape in a woman's mind was not too vile for her to give it shelter.

It was a long way to Camelot—seven good miles by moor and country road. Yonder, far away to the left, twinkled the lights of Rockport, straggling up the edge of the hill from the harbour in the hollow to the topmost house in the village. Molly thought, with a shiver, of the many cosy firesides in the long steep street, of the contented mothers who were sitting beside them—as she might never sit again—with children at their knees. But she had found little bliss in a cottage and her own fireside. It was only now the thing was gone from her that it began to seem sweet. Should she try back, make friends with Mark, talk him out of this fancy of his, and begin life again, content to be Mrs. Peters, and to live under a cloud, till Fortune's wheel gave a new turn in her favour?

No: she could not go back. On the dark road she travelled there was no turning back. She had failed, and all was over

and ended. She had staked all upon this one desperate cast, feeling sure of success.

It was eight o'clock, and all the shops in Camelot were shut, when Molly turned wearily into that up-hill lane where Aunt Jooly had her abode; the merest hovel of cob and thatch adjoining Farmer Somebody's pigsties.

The one lattice—in which there were more paper and rags than glass—was closely shuttered; but there was a dim glimmer of light shining under the door, so Molly lifted the latch and went in. The room was kitchen, parlour, and bedchamber all in one; Aunt Jooly reserving the upper story, which was far from weather-tight, as a storehouse for apples, onions, and fuel. A bed closely curtained with many-coloured patchwork drapery occupied the warmest corner. An ancient armchair filled nearly half the room, and screened the sibyl from all the winds that blew. An old bureau, in which she kept her simples, and which the country people regarded with awe unutterable, as the repository of mysterious powers, and a rickety little round table comprised the rest of Aunt Jooly's belongings.

A witch would not have been complete without her familiar. Aunt Jooly had two in the orthodox feline form. A twin pair of large black cats adorned and guarded the hearth, and showed an invincible jealousy of the tea-kettle, which they evidently considered a rival in their mistress's affections, and an impediment to their full enjoyment of the fire. These cats had been christened Tom and Jerry, and were as well known and as much respected in Camelot as the serviceable Aunt Jooly herself.

The old woman sat over her fire, hidden from view in the big armchair; but the uplifted countenances of Tom and Jerry, and the black teapot and cup and saucer on the table, told Molly that the witch was there. She walked straight to the back of the chair, and looked down at the old nurse, who was nodding and mumbling at the cats while she sipped her tea.

'Lord a-mercy!' cried the crone, when Molly tapped her on the shoulder. 'Who's there?'

She turned round and stared at the face looking down upon her out of the shadows. Such a ghastly face, so strange in its expression, that, for the moment, she hardly recognised it.

'Lord, 'tes you!' she cried. 'I thowt you was up in Lunnon.'

'I have been in London; and now I've come home, and I want the key,' answered Molly, without relaxing a muscle in that rigid face. She had drawn her thick black veil closely round the front of her bonnet, and tied it under her chin, so as to hide the widow's cap.

'Lord, but you d' look ill—that white and whist! And all in black, too!' exclaimed Aunt Jooly, staring at Molly, while she fumbled in a capacious pocket for the key. 'There bain't nought wrong with the childer, be there?'

Molly shook her head impatiently.

'There's your kay,' said the old woman, handing it up over the back of the chair. 'But can't ye come round by the fire and set down a bit, and have a sup o' tay? 'Twill warm you may be, for you look half froze.'

'I've had a cold walk.'

'Why didn't you come in the coach? 'Twas in two hours ago.'

'Good-night,' said Molly, going to the door.

'Well, you're uncommon short with a poor old woman, Mrs. Payters. You'll not find a cobweb in your house, I'll warrant; and 'tes as dry as a bone.'

'Thank you, Aunt Jooly. I sha'n't forget that I'm beholden to you for that,' answered Molly.

She was gone before the old woman could say another word; but Aunt Jooly sat staring at the door for some minutes, to the wonderment, and even uneasiness, of Tom and Jerry, who interrogated her dumbly, by sundry pattings and scratchings of their forepaws on her ancient and bony knees.

'She d' look as if she'd seen a ghost,' muttered the hag.

CHAPTER XXXVIII

MARK IS WARNED.

WHILE Mark was cutting short Mrs. Morris's period of service, George Leland walked up and down the firelit drawing-room, waiting till he should hear that the patient above-stairs was out of danger, and that Barbara's mind was at ease. He walked slowly up and down the fine old room, which looked its best by this variable light—a light that flashed fitfully upon the bosses and armorial bearings of the richly-carved ceiling, and lent glow and colour to the faded tints of drapery and walls.

He was left for a considerable time with no better company than his own thoughts, and those were not cheering. He had done his duty, but the duty done left no sense of delight. There was none of the rapture, the afterglow which lit his soul at the close of a day's hard fighting—a hair-breadth escape with life and limb where annihilation had seemed inevitable. He had done his duty. Seeing his rival—the man whom of all men he had most reason to envy and to hate—in the fell grip of death, he had wrestled with the grim destroyer, as Hercules wrestled for Alcestis, and had come off victorious. And now, alone with his own thoughts, in cold blood, the battle over, the victory won, he was able to contemplate what he had done, and to speculate upon what might have happened if he had held his hand, stood aside out of the fray, and left Barbara's husband to Fate and local doctors.

'He was dying,' he said to himself, 'dying of narcotic poison

—so nearly gone that a quarter of an hour's delay might have turned the scale. It was not I who poisoned him. Suppose I had let him go—left him to slip into the dark river—should I have been less a murderer, I wonder—seeing what I saw, and knowing what I know—than the secret wretch who gave him the poison ?

Conscience told him that his sin would have been no less than murder.

'Thank God I did not hesitate, even for a second,' he said to himself. 'I had but one thought, one desire, and that was to save him. Now that I have won him back to life, when he is well again, and he and I are on an equal footing, I may wish him dead ; but an hour ago, seeing him helpless, at the last extremity, my soul did not waver. Satan had no power over me.

'Who could have poisoned him, and for what end ?'

This was a question George Leland could not answer, knowing so little of the man's life or surrounding circumstances ; but he thought with a shudder how, if Vyvyan Penruth had died by poison, he being in the neighbourhood at the time, suspicion might have pointed to Barbara as the poisoner—might, nay, must inevitably have done so, since the victim had himself accused her.

This would have been the horrible sequence to Vyvyan's death. George Leland trembled when he remembered how near that death had been. Better a thousand times that he and Barbara should be parted for ever than that her future days should be darkened by such a scandal, made loathsome to her by the world's contempt.

He thanked God for the chance that had brought him to Vyvyan's bedside in time. That flagging pulse, that slowly-labouring heart, whose every beat had grown weaker as Leland listened, must have stopped before the coming of the Launceston doctor. Vyvyan Penruth would have died in his lethargic sleep, while his kindred stood round his bed, ignorant and helpless.

'That black-eyed woman was in it,' thought George Leland. 'I never saw a face that so plainly indicated evil. And she had prevented them giving him brandy, knowing no doubt that brandy was the only thing to save him. Yes, she is the plotter. she is the poisoner. God knows why.'

Flossie came fluttering in at this moment.

'No lamp, and the fire almost out, and you have had no dinner !' she exclaimed breathlessly. 'What a horribly rude, inhospitable set of people you must think us ! And in Cornwall, too, a county famous for its hospitality. Dinner was ready ages ago, but there was no bell rung, on account of Vyvyan, and neither ma, nor Miss Penruth, nor I was in the humour to eat anything, so we stayed up-stairs, and Gilmore brought us some tea. But I did suppose that Dickson would have had the sense

to look after you. I feel perfectly wretched to think you have been treated so badly.'

'Don't make yourself uncomfortable on my account, Flossie. I don't wish to dine. How is your brother-in-law?'

'Better. The Launceston doctor says he will come all right. It was a sharp attack, but the Launceston doctor promises to pull him through it. But it is you we have to thank the most,' added Flossie; 'but for you I believe he would have died. Odd, isn't it? And wasn't it lucky that I thought of fetching you?'

'Most providential.'

'Yes, I generally think of the right thing. I remembered how you said that if ever Barbara was in trouble I was to come to you or let you know; and here she was in the most dreadful trouble; and though I had no idea what you could do to help us, I felt that your presence would be a safeguard; so I bundled on my habit and came.'

'You acted bravely, wisely, splendidly, Flossie. And now, if the doctor says that Mr. Penruth is out of danger, I may as well ride back to Rockport. I can do no good here.'

'Ride back alone by a strange road this dark night?' ejaculated Flossie.

'It won't be my first dark ride, Flossie, nor my longest. I have ridden fifty miles between sunset and sunrise many a time, and have ridden many a mile by night when I was so tired that I have slept soundly in my saddle.'

'And didn't you tumble off?' asked Flossie.

'Not I! When a man spends half his life on horseback, the movement of his horse is no more than the rocking of a baby's cradle. May I ring the bell and order my horse, Flossie?'

'Not till you have dined. I will not let you leave this house without refreshment.'

'Won't you? Well, then, you shall make me a cup of tea, and then I sha'n't fall asleep as I ride over the moor. Let us drink tea together, and I'll try to fancy I am in the parlour at Camberwell.'

'Do you remember the first evening?' cried Flossie, when she had rung the bell and given her orders. 'I shall never forget how you attacked our bread-and-butter.'

'I had not dined, you see. That was hardly fair in a partial boarder, was it?'

'O, but you made noble amends. York hams and innumerable baskets of strawberries, Dundee marmalade and Scotch shortbread! I wonder we were not all made bilious by your generosity. Those were happy days, weren't they?'

'Very happy,' he answered, with a sigh; and then relapsed into gloom.

Dickson appeared presently with the tea-tray and urn, and Flossie occupied herself in making tea, while George Leland

walked slowly up and down the room, almost unconscious of her presence.

In her infinite pity for him, she made his tea desperately strong, and then half drowned it with cream.

'Come,' she said, 'sit down by the fire and be comfortable, as you used to be at Camberwell.' And let us talk cheerfully,' she continued, with an assumption of gaiety, when the Major had drawn his chair to the hearth and taken his teacup. 'Tell me about the Mutiny.'

'That is hardly a cheerful subject.'

'No, I suppose it isn't; but it's exciting, at any rate. You were wounded at Lucknow, Bab told me.'

'Yes, Flossie, badly wounded; as near death as the most eager experimentalist need wish to be. It was after the storming, when I had passed scathless through the breach, shoulder to shoulder with one of the finest soldiers in India, that I got struck down by a Sepoy's bullet. I was hunting out a party of ruffians who were hiding in the dark rooms of the Begum's palace, when one of them fired at me. It was not his luckiest shot, for the Highlanders bayoneted every man of the party, while I was being carried off for dead. I was in hospital three dreary months after this. When my faithful troopers were told I was killed, not a man of them believed it. That could not be, they said; Sahib Leland could not be killed: they had seen me so often come unharmed through the hail of bullets, and cut my way through a ring of swords without a scratch. But there must come an end to every man's career, must there not, Flossie?'

'Pray don't talk as if yours were ended. You'll go back to India, won't you, by and by?'

'If I live, Flossie; if I live long enough.'

Flossie looked at him uneasily. The hollow cheek, and glassy brightness of the sunken eye, were not indicative of returning health. Major Leland looked weaker and more worn than when she had seen him a few days ago at Rockport. Fired with excitement, face to face with danger, he had seemed all force and power just now by Vyvyan's bed; but the occasion past, and the excitement over, he looked as he had looked in Barbara's eyes that stormy afternoon—a man whose days were numbered.

He would eat nothing, but enjoyed his cup of tea, and told Flossie how often, after a weary ride under the midnight stars, he had longed for that cheering cup, before he lay down to rest in his tent.

His horse had been ordered to be ready for him at eight o'clock. It was now half-past seven.

'You would like to see Barbara before you go, would you not?' asked Flossie.

'No, I won't have her disturbed. She has made up her mind to stay with her husband; she is his safest guardian. But then

is some one in this house I want to see—Mr. Penruth's brother. What kind of a fellow is he?

'Very good-natured,' answered Flossie.

'Does that mean rather stupid?'

'Well, I should hardly call him a wonder of cleverness, but I believe he is a good man of business. He is manager at the quarries, you know.'

'Indeed! Then I suppose he has the average amount of common-sense. I want to have a little serious talk with him before I leave.'

'I'll run and look for him,' said Flossie, 'and ask him to come to you. And then I think I had better go back to poor mother, who is in a dreadful state of mind, and is being made all the worse by that horrid Miss Penruth.'

'That lady does not appear the essence of amiability.'

'She's the sourest, most cantankerous creature! Actually objects to me because I do nothing but read novels, ride her brother's horses, and eat thunder and lightning.'

'Thunder and lightning?'

'Bread-and-treacle and clotted cream,' explained Flossie. 'It's delicious. As if one could do anything better than get rid of time in such a lonely place as this!'

'And how does Barbara dispose of her life?' asked Leland.

'Poor Barbara! She never complains, but her existence must be dreadfully dull when we are not here. And how she can put up with Miss Penruth is more than I can understand. Well, I'll go and hunt for Mark. Good-bye.'

'Good-bye, Flossie. Let me know when you are going home, that I may go to you as soon as you are ready for me.'

'Do you really mean it?'

'Really and truly.'

'I am so glad. We will make you so comfortable,—as our guest, you know; no partial boarding this time.'

'I fear I may be a troublesome guest.'

'How so?'

'Invalids are apt to give trouble, and I am still on the sick-list.'

'We won't mind that. It shall be our business to cure you. There's a doctor mother had, in a Tilbury,—I believe he's tremendously clever; and I'm sure he ought to be, for his bill was something frightful.'

'Good-bye, Flossie. Time is going, and I want to see Mr. Mark Penruth.'

Flossie shook hands with him and ran off, with a curious pain in her heart, despite her assumption of cheerfulness.

Mark came into the drawing-room presently, with a pale face and dejected aspect.

'You want to see me, Flossie tells me,' he said.

'Yes ; I want to say a few words about your brother's illness before I go,' answered Major Leland, observant of Mark's pale and anxious countenance.

'I shall be glad to hear anything you can say.'

'You know that Mr. Penruth believes himself to have been poisoned.'

'Yes.'

'I have reason to know that his suspicion is well founded. He has all the symptoms of poison. Now I want to put you on your guard. Medical men are either very slow to find out foul play, or very much disinclined to communicate their suspicions. They leave the coroner to make the discovery when the patient is dead. It's the safer way, for them, and saves trouble.'

'Vyvyan is not going to die.'

'Not from this dose. I want to warn you against a servant in this house. God knows what reason she can have for plotting his death, but I believe that widow woman, your sister's maid, is the poisoner.'

'You need have no further fear of her. She has left this house, never to enter it again.'

'What, then you too had the same suspicion ? Mind, I had nothing to go upon but her face. That told the whole story.'

'I had some previous knowledge of her character. Acting upon that, I turned her out of doors.'

'You did wisely, and I believe your brother is safe. What in Heaven's name could have been the woman's motive ?'

'We needn't go into that,' answered Mark moodily. 'She will never come into this house again.'

'It is a blessed deliverance. And now let me recommend you to keep a close watch, and to tell your own doctor everything you know about the attempt that has been made on your brother's life.'

'I shall tell him all that need be told.'

Mark went out to the porch with the Major and saw him mount, and then the two men shook hands and parted, George Leland riding slowly through the mists of a November night.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

'IT CASTS A CLOUD UPON THE WHOLE HOUSEHOLD.'

A LETTER was brought to Mark early next morning as he sat beside his brother's bed, addressed in a writing which he knew too well. A boy had brought it from Camelot, but had not waited for an answer.

'If you want to see me again,' wrote Molly, 'come to the cottage to-morrow. There are some things that must be settled between us before we part. If you refuse to come it will cause

trouble; and as this is the last favour I shall ever ask you, it isn't much for you to grant. You'll find the key of the back door behind the water-butt, in the old place where I used to hide it when I went marketing of an evening.'

Mark turned the letter over and over in his hands as he sat beside the curtained bed, where his brother lay sleeping a quiet and natural sleep.

Yes, he must comply with this request, hateful as it would be to him to look upon the woman's face again, loathsome as the very thought of her had become. He must see her once more, and arrange with her how her future life was to be spent, and where. She must not be left without the means of living, or she would commit more crimes, and make the name of Penruth infamous—that honoured name which he had been weak enough to give her. He must provide her with an income, and must make that income contingent upon her living ever so far away from Cornwall. Let her go and hide herself in the great wilderness of London, where no one would know anything about her.

Yes, he must pension her out of his salary, and he must keep the three boys at school; pay for their schooling, and clothe them, and visit them now and then, and do what he could to compensate them for the loss of their mother.

'They have her blood in their veins,' he thought with a shudder. 'What if it should show itself by and by in evil deeds? Yet they seem honest open-hearted little fellows now, and they take after my family in their looks; they are every inch Penruths. God grant the bad strain may never show itself!'

He determined to ride over to Camelot in the afternoon, when he had seen Mr. Didcott, and heard his opinion of his patient. Didcott and the Launceston doctor had been closeted together for half an hour last night, and had agreed as to the cause of Vyvyan's illness. Didcott had remained with his patient all night, administering stimulants, and guarding against the possibility of foul play in any quarter. That Vyvyan had been poisoned he was now very sure, but whom to suspect he knew not. Sometimes his thought pointed to Mark, who had so much to gain by his brother's death; and then the needle-point of suspicion veered and turned to the wife, whose loveless marriage-bonds had been so nearly broken.

In any case Mr. Didcott felt that it was his bounden duty to watch the patient. Before he drove away from Place that morning in the chill November daybreak, he took Dickson into his confidence.

'Somebody has been trying to poison your master,' he said. 'God alone knows who it is. I want you to keep watch in Mr Penruth's room while I am away. Mrs. Penruth is nursing him; that's all very well, but she is young and inexperienced, and wants your help. Don't leave her for so much as half a minute.'

'No, sir,' answered the man, with a troubled look. 'What you tell me is very dreadful, sir. It casts a cloud upon the whole household.'

'No doubt it does, Dickson. It will be somebody's business to find out where that cloud is blackest.'

'It's a curious thing,' murmured the butler. 'I suppose you know all about it. Miss Penruth's maid, sir, a highly respectable widow-person—always seemed rather above her situation, didn't mix and mingle with us, sir, in the 'ousekeeper's room, as she might have been expected to do—'

'Yes, yes, yes—go on, can't you?' cried Didcott impatiently.

'She goes and disappears last evening, sir. No one knows where or wherefore. She had given notice to quit, I allow, but her time wasn't up for another week; and last night she is found to be missing. When ten o'clock struck there was no one to take down Miss Penruth's hair or attend to her little wants Mrs. Morris's drawers and boxes as usual, but no Mrs. Morris. If the witches had carried her off upon their broomsticks, she could hardly have made a cleaner bolt of it.'

'Strange,' muttered the Camelot surgeon; 'I never quite liked the manner of that woman. I never could get an honest look at her face. She was always hiding in corners, and keeping herself in shadow.'

'If it wasn't unbecoming a Christian and a Primitive Methodist, I should say that I couldn't abide her,' said the butler.

'Well, everything will come out in time, I suppose. Take care of your master; that is what you have to do. He'll be about again in a day or two if all goes well, and then he'll be able to take care of himself.'

Mr. Didcott took his seat in Vyvyan's dog-cart, and rattled away in the damp chilly air, eager to get back to Camelot and settle for his parish patients.

Vyvyan was rallying gradually. Digitalis has the quality, rare among vegetable poisons, of cumulative power, and a long course of digitalis had brought the strong man very low. Mind and body had alike suffered; and now, as he lay on his bed, feeble, almost helpless, his soul was burdened by the thought that life, won back for him, could give him nothing worth having.

He still believed, despite Barbara's gentle presence, despite her seeming grief, that it was a wicked wife's hand which had mixed the poison in his cup; that it was a false woman's desire to go back to an old lover which had been the motive for this attempt at murder. He watched her with dull heavy eyes as she sat near his bed, or moved softly to and fro to perform some service for him; watched her in silence and gloom, believing her a monster of iniquity under the outward form of innocence and beauty.

He had hardly spoken since his recovery from the stupor

that had lasted so long. Barbara knew not whether this dumbness was a sign of only half-recovered consciousness, or whether it indicated an angry and unpardoning soul. She went on quietly doing her duty, and made no moan. Sometimes her thoughts wandered from that dull silent room, and followed the guest who had been there yesterday—that dark haggard face, so like and yet so unlike the face whose tender smile had lighted her youth; that gaunt wasted figure, the clothes hanging loosely upon shrunken limbs. O, how changed he was! and yet how familiar and dear his presence had been! and what comfort and security she had felt in the sound of the resolute voice, the fire of the commanding eye!

He had saved her in her hour of need, and now he had gone out of her life for ever. It was not well that they two should meet.

She sat by her husband's bed meekly, patiently, even though there was no look of gratitude or affection in the eyes which followed her every movement when the patient lay awake, watchful in his silence. It was a relief when he fell into a peaceful slumber; and Mark, with the old-fashioned idea that there was something soothing in darkness, drew the heavy damask curtain between the sleeper and winter's brief sunshine.

Dickson had come to help his mistress in her attendance on the invalid. He sat at a respectful distance by the fire, and was ready when there was nourishment or medicine to be given.

Mark stole softly to the window when he had thrust his wife's unwelcome letter in his pocket, and stood there looking at the dark-brown hills rising far off above the level line of the moor.

Mrs. Trevornock and Flossie were taking their rest, after having sat up all night, too anxious to retire till they were told that Mr. Penruth was out of danger. Miss Penruth, reassured as to her brother's condition by the two doctors, had withdrawn to her own room, reluctant to the last, and insisting that her place was by Vyvyan's side. What were the claims of a frivolous young wife, introduced into the family, as it were, yesterday, when weighed against those of a sister who had been born and reared under the same roof?

'I begin to think there is no truth in the saying that blood is thicker than water,' said Priscilla indignantly.

CHAPTER XL.

BUSINESS FOR AUNT JOOLY.

MR. DIDCOTT and Mr. Fordyce, the surgeon from Launceston, met at three o'clock in the afternoon, and pronounced the patient decidedly better; and there and then did the stranger resign all charge of Mr. Penruth to his regular attendant, and

accept with due courtesy the handsome fee which Mrs. Penruth slipped into his hand.

'I cannot claim the merit of having saved his life,' said Mr. Fordyce. 'Your friend, Major Selim, was beforehand with me. But for his strong measures, Mr. Penruth would have sunk before I arrived.'

'Thank God he knew how to act!'

'Yes, it is a blessing to have some one with experience and common-sense at hand in such an emergency. A very superior man, evidently. But, tell me, now, Mrs. Penruth,' pursued the doctor, in a confidential voice which neither Mark nor the butler could hear, 'have you any idea how your husband happened to take this poison?'

'I have no idea; I am utterly in the dark. He has no enemy that I know of; he has done nothing to provoke anybody's enmity; and yet, in his own house, surrounded by old servants, some one tries to murder him. It is most horrible! It will make life a burden to us.'

'Surrounded by old servants, you say, Mrs. Penruth? Then there is no one among the servants whom you could suspect?'

'Why should a servant try to kill him? For what motive? There has been only one stranger in the household since my marriage, and that is Miss Penruth's maid.'

'She is a respectable person, I suppose?'

'Yes, she was highly recommended. You saw her yesterday. A widow.'

'Yes, I remember,' said Mr. Fordyce, who was not a physiognomist; 'a very superior person.'

'Miss Penruth has a high opinion of her. She used to sit up with my husband when he was ill with low fever a little time ago.'

'O,' said the surgeon, looking thoughtful, 'she used to sit up with him! Indeed!' And then he took his leave, pondering as he departed whether this superior female could be the person who had dosed Mr. Penruth.

'But what motive?' argued Mr. Fordyce. 'What motive could there be, unless she were only the tool of somebody else?'

Didcott and Mark were in the adjoining room discussing the same subject, or rather Didcott asking questions, and Mark reluctantly answering.

'The thing must be sifted,' said Didcott. 'It is due to all of us, especially to the members of the family, that a strict investigation should be made. The thing has been going on for a long time, you see; it is a deep-laid plot. I found these symptoms in your brother nearly three months ago, and took them for indications of heart-disease, as any other medical man would have done who knew what I knew of the family antecedents. The business must be investigated, Mark, or your brother's life will not be safe in his own house. I don't want to

make myself troublesome, or to make the matter public, if it can be helped. But your brother's life must be protected. If it hadn't been for Major What's-his-name's promptitude, the Squire would be a dead man to-day.'

'Yes, yes: he shall be protected,' Mark answered, nervously evading the surgeon's eye.

'Do you suspect anybody in the house?'

'Well, yes; I had my suspicions last night, considering the various circumstances of the case. The person I suspect is now out of the house.'

'I understand. It was that shifty-eyed widow, your sister's maid. I never liked her. Then it was you who sent her away?'

'Yes; but you needn't say anything about it to my sister.'

'But what motive could she have had?'

Mark tapped his forehead significantly.

'You think she was queer in her head, eh? It was a curious form for madness to take, though. Never knew a case of the kind. Homicidal mania generally shows itself in violence; but a slow, cautious, sustained attempt at poisoning is hardly compatible with insanity. Your lunatic is never capable of consecutive action. He forgets to-day what he did yesterday.'

'I can't account for the thing in any other way,' said Mark.

'I can't account for it at all,' retorted Didcott; 'but it must be accounted for. Such an attempt mustn't pass unquestioned.'

He went back to his gig, which had brought him over from Camelot, and drove home, sorely troubled in mind. He began to fear that his suspicions of yesterday were but too correct, and that his old friend Mark must be concerned in this diabolical attempt; in which case the mysterious widow was doubtless Mark's accomplice, and had been made the scapegoat. Who would profit so largely as Mark by Vyvyan's death? The surgeon remembered how they had talked together of the Squire's fatal malady, and how Mark's eye had brightened as he spoke of the horses and hounds he would keep when he became master at Place.

Mark waited till Mr. Didcott had been on his road for half an hour, and then went out to the stable to get the brown cob saddled, and on that unamiable brute started at a thundering trot for Camelot. It was dusk before he rode along the quiet road where stood the stone cottage in which he had tasted the joys and cares of surreptitious domesticity.

There was no cheerful glow of fire or lighted lattice to guide him to the spot; but he knew every inch of the ground, even in this misty duskiness of winter evening, and he led the cob round to the back of the premises, and tied him to the post of a low wooden gate which opened from a ploughed field into the little kitchen-garden behind the house. The back windows, like the front, were all dark.

Mark tried the back-door, and found it locked.

'She's out, evidently. Why did she ask me to come if she was going to be gadding about?' Mark interrogated inwardly, as he felt for the key in its hiding-place behind the water-butt.

His heart sank within him with a sharp and bitter pang as he remembered many a home-coming in the past, when his wife and her small servant had gone on some household errand, and he had let himself in quietly, and had sat by the firelit hearth waiting patiently for Molly's return; pleased if she came home bright and good-tempered, and seemed glad to see him; forbearing even when she was snappish and reproachful.

She had been his wife, the woman of his choice, perfectly beautiful in his sight, the mother of his bonny boys; and he could not contemplate her wickedness without the keenest anguish.

He went to this meeting of to-night with reluctance and fear. He knew his wife's power over him, how she had always been able to argue him into a surrender of his own opinion, and a tame submission to her will. He had been able to stand against her last night, for horror and wrath had made him iron. But should he be able to stand as firm to-night? Might not her tears or her passionate assertion of innocence beat down and overrule his own conviction of her guilt? Could he, who but once in his life had mastered her, and that by the force of supreme indignation, master her again in his cooler temper of to-night?

'Let me think how she tried to kill my brother, how she would have made me an unconscious accomplice in his murder,' he said to himself, as he opened the door.

Within, all was dark and dreary. It seemed strange that there should be no gleam of firelight on this winter night. He went into the kitchen, which smelt of damp, and groped about for candle and matches. Having found these and lighted his candle, he went into the parlour and looked about him. All was empty, dull, and cheerless; the neat little room, once so snug and bright upon winter evenings, had the aspect of a place which has been long uninhabited. Mark's heart sank as he looked at the hearth where he had so often romped with his boys, tossing and tumbling them over and over like a litter of puppies, in the rosy firelight. He had not been happy beside that fire, for discontent and discord had been the sauce to his meat, and the bitter in his cup, from almost the beginning of things; but there were some sweet memories, nevertheless—childish kisses, childish laughter, chubby arms entwined about his neck.

He sat beside the cheerless hearth and waited, wrapped in gloomiest thought. The minutes were intolerably long. He expected momentarily to hear the click of Molly's key in the front-door, and he started at every crack of the furniture, at every creak of the leafless branches outside the window. He waited

for half an hour, and then began to get uneasy, and to think that his wicked wife had played him a trick. He was very uncomfortable about his horse, which he had left shelterless in the cold.

'I had better have put him up at the King's Arms,' he thought; 'but I didn't want any one to know I was here.'

Too impatient to sit still any longer in that deserted room, Mark took up the candle and went on a voyage of discovery, to see if by chance a letter had been left for him somewhere to inform him that Mrs. Peters had changed her mind, and left Camelot without waiting to see him.

He looked into the other parlour, but there was no letter. He went up the narrow staircase to the principal bedroom, which it had been Molly's delight to keep a picture of neatness.

One glance at the white curtained bed showed him a figure lying there, and he called—forgetting for the moment all that had happened—'Molly!' in the old familiar tone. A second glance froze the blood in his veins, and he went slowly up to the bed, and shudderingly touched the icy hand, and bent down to look at the awful face.

It was his wife, dressed in the black gown she wore when she left Place—dead. A mug, with a little brownish liquid at the bottom of it, stood on a table near at hand. This, Mark fancied, had held the sleeping draught which lulled her to that last long sleep.

What should he do? He sank into a chair, helpless, paralysed with horror. Slowly his power to think and act came back to him.

'I must do something; I must tell somebody,' he thought. 'I can't sit here alone all night—looking at her.'

Then, wiping the cold sweat from his forehead, he rose and moved towards the door, leaving the candle where he had put it down. He would not leave his dead wife alone in the dark.

'I'll fetch Didcott,' he said to himself, hurrying out to his horse. 'He has always been my friend. I must tell him everything. And the nurse, old Aunt Jooly, she can be trusted; those two between them can do all that's wanted.'

He mounted the cob and rode down the hill to the High-street, where Didcott's lighted surgery window gave him a feeling of comfort. The surgeon was drinking tea, and eating squabpie, after his drive from Place, and was telling Mrs. Didcott the state of affairs in the Penruth mansion. He came out at Mark's summons, profoundly astonished.

'Your brother no worse, I hope,' he cried. 'There's been no relapse, eh?'

'No; I came away half an hour after you. I want you, badly, up the road, yonder.'

'At the cottage?' asked Didcott. 'Why, there's nobody living there, is there?'

'Don't I say you are wanted? Come this instant! I'm going to fetch Aunt Jooly; but I shall be there before you.'

'Well, upon my soul, now that's rather hard upon a poor beggar,' grumbled the surgeon, who had been making up medicines in his senna-scented surgery for the last hour, and had only just settled to his comfortable meat-tea. 'Aunt Jooly, too? It must be another baby. They might have given me notice.'

'Shall I put the pie in the oven?' asked Mrs. Didcott.

'Not a bit of use. Goodness knows how long I may be away.'

Mark hurried on to Aunt Jooly's hovel, and, finding the witch at home, bade her come to the cottage instantly. She too speculated upon a baby, and made a bundle of her night-gear and sundry other necessities before she started, and looked in at a neighbour's to confide Tom and Jerry to friendly care, so that those familiar spirits should be nourished and provided for in the event of her prolonged absence.

Didcott found Mark waiting for him at the cottage-door.

'What is it?' he asked. 'Anything bad?'

'Very bad,' answered Mark: 'she's dead, and I believe she has poisoned herself.'

'My God!'

'Didcott, I had better tell you all the truth, at once,' said Mark, grasping him by the arm, as they stood in the dark passage together. 'She was my wife. I kept our marriage a secret because I was afraid of offending my brother.'

'I suspected as much all along,' answered Didcott.

'That isn't all, though. Six months ago she took it into her head—when my sister wanted a maid—to go to Place, under a false name, with a false character. I opposed the plan, tooth and nail; but she would have her own way. It seemed a foolish fancy; but there was no particular harm in it, as I thought, and I gave way.'

'Then she was the woman they called Morris?'

'Yes.'

'Now I understand why she always fought so shy of me. I could never get a look at her face. And now she has poisoned herself?'

'I'm afraid so.'

'After trying to poison your brother. It's a bad business, Mark. First and last, I don't think I ever heard of anything worse. How do I know you were not in it?'

'You know me,' said Mark, with a touch of manly feeling; 'that ought to be answer enough to your question.'

'Well, old fellow, I believe you,' replied the surgeon. 'But I have been very uneasy in my mind, I can tell you, since last night. I've always taken you for a good-natured fellow, who would go out of his way rather than tread upon a worm; and to think that you had a hand in poisoning your brother—it was

a fearful thought ! Well, you've got yourself into a confounded mess, and I must see you through it. There'll have to be an inquest, I'm afraid.'

'Can't that be avoided somehow ?'

'I think not. It will be best to do things in a regular way, and bear the brunt of it. Very little need come out, beyond the circumstances of her death. I think it will be wise for you to come forward and state that she was your wife. Everybody in Camelot knows she was associated with you ; there's no hiding that ; and it will be safest to tell the truth. If the fact of the marriage were to come out afterwards, it would be awkward for you.'

'I'll do what you like. But it will ruin me with my brother. I shall have lost everything.'

'Who knows ? He may not be so hard upon you as you think.'

'He has been softer-hearted and kinder to me since his illness. Well, I must brave it out,' said Mark.

Didcott went up-stairs to the bedroom. Mark waited at the open door for Aunt Jooly, who presently arrived, breathless, and hugging her bundle. Mark briefly told her that it was for the dead, and not for the newly-born, her services were needed, and bade her go up-stairs. She went, groaning and bemoaning at every step.

'The handsomest woman in Camelot,' she sighed, 'and as good a friend to me as I ever had. I saw it in her face last night. She was that white and whisht !'

CHAPTER XLI.

DEARER THAN MONEY.

THE inquest was held next day at the King's Arms ; and the coroner and twelve jurymen—most of whom had known Mark's wife years ago, when she was the smartest and briskest of barmaids, and when sharp retorts and impertinent sallies fell from her cherry lips as readily as the pearls and diamonds shed by the fortunate damsel in the fairy tale—went in solemn conclave to look upon her dead face in the darkened cottage-chamber.

Mark told his story briefly : how the deceased woman was his wife, and he had kept his marriage concealed on account of his brother ; how she had been away for some time, and had returned without notice, and had sent him a note which brought him to the cottage, where he had found her dead.

At the coroner's request Mark showed his wife's last letter, which told nothing more than he had said.

'You have quarrelled, I conclude from this, said the coroner, when he had read the letter aloud to the jury.

'Yes, we had quarrelled.'

'Seriously?'

'Yes.'

'And you contemplated parting?'

'Yes.'

Mr. Didcott stated that the deceased had been dead for some hours when Mark summoned him to her. He would say that she had been dead ten hours. The cause of death was no doubt an overdose of an infusion of foxglove, the dregs of which had been found in a mug close by the bed. He had made a microscopic examination of these dregs, and had discovered seeds, and traces of leaves in the liquid. He had been shown a pipkin, which had been found on the kitchen hearth, containing the pulpy remains of leaves and flowers from which the infusion had evidently been made. This infusion might have been taken ignorantly as a sleeping draught by a person unacquainted with its power. This opinion had an effect on the jury, who, taking into consideration that the Penruths were one of the best families in North Cornwall, and that a verdict of *felo de se* would be an uncomfortable blot upon the family history, were unanimously of opinion that the said Mary Penruth had died accidentally from the effect of an overdose of sleeping stuff; taking her departure out of this life as innocently as a babe which is launched into eternity by an injudicious dose of comforting syrup.

Mark breathed more freely when it was all over, and his old friends were standing round him in the inn-parlour, murmuring consolatory speeches, and shaking hands with him in a kindly and protecting way.

'And now I must go and make a clean breast of it to my brother,' he said, cutting short all friendly manifestations, 'before he gets well enough to read an account of to-day's business in the newspaper.'

He lingered only to arrange with Didcott about the funeral. The family surgeon was to see to everything. It was to be a quiet respectable funeral, in the little churchyard yonder among the fields. Would Mark follow? Yes; it would be best, perhaps, to silence scandal. He and Didcott would go together in a mourning-coach: that was all.

Mark rode slowly homeward, pondering on the difficulties that still had to be faced. Yet though those difficulties weighed heavily upon him, there was a sense of relief which in his mind seemed to lighten all his troubles. For ten years his wife had been his one abiding vexation. She had embittered every day of his life, and during the last forty-eight hours her existence had been a horror to him. She was gone. He looked back at his life with her shudderingly, as a man might who had lived unawares cheek-by-jowl with a cobra.

Mark had spent the previous night at Camelot, but Didcott had been to Place early in the morning, and had brought back a

d account of Vyvyan's progress. He was going on slowly towards recovery, but he was wonderfully silent and low-spirited

'You can't conceive how this business has shaken him,' said Didcott; 'he looks ten years older since it began. It was touch and go that night, I can tell you.'

Mark put up his horse, and then went straight to his brother's room. Vyvyan was sitting in the big armchair by the fire, watching the burning logs, with dull hopeless eyes. He had always been gaunt and bony, but he looked now a mere shadow of the once vigorous Squire. Barbara sat on the opposite side of the hearth, with a dainty little table before her, and some delicate fancy work in her hands. She too was pale and sad, and it seemed as if all the brightness of her youth had departed for ever.

Vyvyan acknowledged his brother's entrance with a nod but did not even look up.

'Well, old fellow,' said Mark, with an attempt at cheerfulness, 'ever so much better, I hear. Worlds better, isn't he, Barbara?'

'Yes, he is much better, Mr. Didcott says. He will soon be well, and able to go for a drive on the moor. Am I to drive you in the pony-carriage, Vyvyan, or will you go in the landau?' asked Barbara, looking up from her work with tender deprecating eyes, as of one who sued for pardon, yet hardly knew how she had offended.

'It doesn't much matter which,' answered Vyvyan. 'I shall be in the way in either vehicle, I daresay.'

The gentle eyes looked up at him again, and seemed to ask, 'How have I deserved this?' But Barbara's lips made no answer.

'Where have you been, and what is the matter with you?' asked Vyvyan, looking at his brother, who had come to the front of the hearth, and was standing there with the light full on his face. 'You look as if there were something wrong.'

'There has been something very wrong. I have been in great trouble. I should like to tell you all about it, Vyvyan, even though it may make you angry—set you against me for ever, perhaps.'

Barbara had risen instinctively, and was gathering up her work.

'I had better leave you together,' she said.

'Yes, dear; I shall be glad if you will leave us alone for a little while,' answered Mark. 'Is there anything Vyvyan ought to take during the next half hour—wine—medicine?'

'No, there is nothing. I shall be in the dressing-room. Call me when you have done talking.'

And so she left them, looking back anxiously at Vyvyan's moody face as she crossed the threshold, fearful lest there should be some angry discussion between the brothers; for although

not a Christian of Miss Penruth's lofty type, she was by nature a peacemaker.

Mark seated himself in Barbara's chair. Vyvyan had relapsed into moody silence, and seemed hardly conscious of his brother's presence.

'You feel better, don't you, Vyvyan?' asked Mark presently.

'Yes, I suppose I am better. There has been no return of those horrible sensations.'

'Are you not glad to know that the idea of heart-disease was a false alarm?'

Vyvyan looked up suddenly, the dull eyes kindling, the stern lips quivering with pain and anger.

'Glad to know that I have been poisoned in my own house? Glad to know that secret murder has been sitting at my hearth—smiling in my face? Glad to know that I have been meshed in a web of treachery and fair-faced wickedness? Glad—Great God! Do not talk to me, Mark. Leave me to fight my battle alone—to work out my life in my own way.'

'Vyvyan, you have some horrible suspicion! You are wrong, utterly wrong! Vyvyan, brother, forgive me, if you can! It was I that brought your enemy into the house, not knowing her wickedness. I know who it was that tried to poison you. I know all about it. Didcott knows it too. He can bear me out. It was my wife.'

'Your wife! What wife?'

Mark told him the whole story—the story of his weak yielding to temptation fourteen years ago, and of all the evil that had come of that folly and his concealment of it. Vyvyan listened with fast-beating heart, with the glow of new-born gladness kindling on his hollow cheek.

What was it to him that his life had been attempted, that a secret foe had been in his household, if that secret enemy was not the wife of his bosom, the idol of his later life? His soul thrilled within him as he heard Mark's confession. Forgive his brother's folly, forgive the weakness of mind and purpose which had so nearly brought him to the grave! Yes, he could forgive anything now that he knew his young wife was innocent, pure, and perfect as he had always thought her till that vile letter was put into his hands.

He covered his face and wept aloud—tears of mingled remorse and joy.

'I thought it was my wife who wanted to shorten my days,' he said. 'That thought made the coming back to life more bitter than death itself. God forgive me! Yes, I thought it was Barbara's work!'

'O Vyvyan, how could you? God gave you an angel for a wife, and yet you could not trust her!'

The brothers clasped hands.

'I have been an arrant fool,' said Mark. 'Can you forgive me—a fool, and not always an honest one? You may as well know all the truth. I had been robbing you for the last three years when Maulford came to make out that balance-sheet. I had been unlucky on the turf, and had speculated in mining shares, in the hope of getting back what I had lost, and had muddled away thousands of your money. If Maulford hadn't doctored the accounts, you must have known all about it. I've been an honest man since then, upon my soul, I have! I pulled up short, and haven't wronged you of a sixpence—'

'Curse your sixpences!' cried Vyvyan, rising feebly out of his big chair. 'There is something in this life dearer than money.'

He went to the dressing-room door and called 'Barbara!'

He opened his arms as she came towards him, and took her to his breast.

'My dearest love, I have wronged you,' he murmured, with unspeakable tenderness. 'I know all now.'

She answered not a word; and looking down at her blanching face, her husband saw that she had fainted in his arms. Half an hour afterwards he knew a secret that promised the fulfilment of his fondest wish, a hope that had almost left him. He was not to die childless; he was not to be the last of the good old line. Before the earliest leaflets of spring were unfolded he might be a father.

CHAPTER XLII.

CLEARING THE ATMOSPHERE.

FROM that day forward there was a new tenderness in Vyvyan's manner to his wife. It seemed as if he could not be kind enough, could not be considerate enough, to make up for the great wrong his thoughts had done her. The man's whole nature seemed to be changed by the ordeal through which he had passed. It was as if he had begun a new life. He was kinder even to Mark than of old, despite that confession which showed how very low his brother had sunk in folly and sin.

He called Mark into his study one day, and told him of the hope that shone before him in the immediate future, like a planet which beams so near the edge of earth's horizon that it seems to belong to us more than all the other stars.

'With God's grace, there will be an heir or an heiress to this estate before next year is three months old, Mark,' said Vyvyan; 'so you see I have been obliged to alter my will. I had given up all hope of children when I put you in for the land, and I thought my days were numbered. It's only fair I should tell you of the change.'

'You are very good,' said Mark, stifling a sigh. 'Of course I knew that will was made under exceptional circumstances. I

never expected it to stand—after—after we had found out that Didcott was wrong about your heart. Thank God that you have a good old age before you. I am more than content, so long as you leave me in my old berth at the quarries. And it's very good of you not to have pitched me out neck and crop, Vyvyan, after what I told you the other day.'

'No, Mark, I'm not going to turn you out. The quarries will be yours when I am gone. I have put you in for those instead of the land. Priscilla has plenty. Take care of the business, and don't get into any more muddles with your accounts. You may feel all the more interest in nursing the property now that you know it will be your own by and by.'

'Vyvyan, you are a good fellow!' Mark exclaimed rapturously. 'An out-and-out brick! And I am glad there is going to be an heir. Yes, heartily, honestly glad. And if you would only start a dozen couple of harriers next season, I don't think I should have anything left to wish for.'

'Wouldn't you, Mark? Well, I'll think about the harriers. But there are those boys of yours—my nephews,' said Vyvyan, making a wry face; for he could not forget their detestable maternal parentage just yet awhile. 'I—I hope they're not like their mother.'

'Not a bit. They are every inch Penruths.'

'I'm glad of that. And they are at school at St. Columb, you say? Poor little creatures! Where will they spend their Christmas holidays?'

'At school, I suppose.'

'That seems hard, with their uncle's big half-empty house so near. Bring them over for a week or so, and let me see what they are made of.'

'O Vyvyan, that is kind of you! I am sure you will like them. They are such jolly little beggars, and as strong as fox-hound puppies.'

'Let them come, they will do me no harm.'

Christmas was close at hand, and Mrs. Trevornock and Flossie had been invited to remain at Place for that social season. They were to return to Camberwell in the first week of the new year, when Flossie was to dance at a grand ball at one of the stuccoed palaces on Denmark Hill. Early in the new year, too, Major Leland was to take up his abode with them; and, exquisitely as the house in South-lane was always kept, there would be much sweeping and garnishing necessary, in Mrs. Trevornock's opinion, before things could be meet for his reception. She had already discussed with Flossie the desirability of a mahogany wardrobe with a plate-glass door, in place of the old-fashioned chest of drawers which now adorned the 'large airy bedroom' that had been offered to the competition of partial boarders five years ago. She had serious thoughts, too, of a

new carpet, and something more fashionable in washstands than the existing arrangement in japanned deal.

The mother was very happy in the new hopefulness which brightened domestic life at Place. Barbara was glad, with a subdued gladness, always tempered with sorrow; for it was ever in her mind that before her there lay a great grief, as well as a strange untasted joy. There was to be loss as well as gain. The resolute eyes that had shone upon her in her darkest night of trouble, the strong hand that had helped her, were never to be near her again. It was in vain that Mrs. Trevornock and Flossie talked hopefully of the balmy spring days in which Major Leland was to regain health and strength, and be nursed and pampered out of all his ailments. Barbara had never forgotten her first impression when she looked into his face in the gray autumn light and saw the stamp of death there.

He had left Rockport, and was staying in Somersetshire with his sisters. A brief note to Mrs. Trevornock had announced his change of address.

About a week before Christmas, Miss Penruth called her brother aside one morning, after breakfast, and announced that she had accepted an invitation to spend the sacred and mildly festive season at Plymouth.

'I ought to have gone much earlier,' she said, 'for there has been a course of Advent sermons that I should have rejoiced to hear; but I did not care to leave till you were out of danger, much as I value the opportunities which Plymouth affords.'

'That was very kind of you,' answered Vyvyan civilly. 'But as there are such—opportunities, I think you said—in Plymouth, don't you think it would be better if you were to live there altogether, with an occasional friendly visit here, of course, to maintain family feeling?'

'Vyvyan, am I to understand that you wish to get rid of me?'

'I don't want to put it offensively. But the fact is, you and Barbara have never cottoned to each other. You don't seem to like her. I don't know why, or ask why. The fact speaks for itself. And then you have such a rooted objection to her sister, who is a good-natured, inoffensive little thing.'

'Inoffensive!' screamed Priscilla. 'Her flippancy would not be abashed by an archbishop. I see, Vyvyan,—I understand what has taken place. I have been undermined.'

'My dear Priscilla!'

'I have been undermined, and I had better go. I am not a pauper to whom bed and board can be a matter of moment. I have an income which is more than adequate to my wants, and I have friends; yes, I thank Providence, I have friends who will gladly receive me, and will know how to value me.'

And thus, without a word more, it became a settled thing that Miss Penruth should depart. There was no quarrelling; and

disputation, vacillation, she would and she would not, in the whole affair. She saw that her brother meant her to go, and she had too exalted a sense of her own dignity to run the risk of being told his meaning a second time. So Mark the sinner stayed, and Priscilla the saint departed; and every one was pleased.

Vyvyan's health and spirits mended rapidly after that understanding with his wife. He was a new man, and took new delight in old familiar things. He looked back at the days when he sat by the fire brooding upon sad fancies, and waiting for death. Life seemed all the sweeter for that dark memory.

'Death must come sooner or later to all of us,' he said to himself; 'but it was a freezing thought to think that he was standing on the threshold of my door.'

He went so far as to write a brief letter to Major Leland, thanking him for the promptitude that had saved his life; and this he showed to Barbara before it was posted.

'I don't want him to think me ungrateful,' he said; 'for I know he acted nobly. He might have let me die like a dog if he had chosen. I doubt if I should have been as generous in his place.'

'I do not believe you would have acted ungenerously,' his wife said, with her grave trusting look.

She had been told just so much as was necessary of Mark's story; and she, her husband, Mark, and the two doctors were the only people who ever knew the history of the crime by which Vyvyan had so nearly lost his life. The gossip that followed the inquest flagged and dwindled and gradually died away, and the scandal of Mark's foolish marriage became only a legend of Camelot life, a tale for Aunt Jooly to tell to future generations.

Priscilla devoted herself for about a week to the task of packing up her belongings, which were numerous; and then, after a sour leave-taking of brothers and sister-in-law, she went her way, only to reënter the house as a visitor.

'I don't think you'll often be troubled with me, Vyvyan,' she said, drawing her slim figure to its utmost height, as she stood on the threshold by the Squire's side, while her lighter luggage was being stowed into the carriage. The bulk of her possessions had gone before in one of the farm wagons.

'You will be welcome whenever you please to come, Pris, so long as you come in a friendly spirit,' answered Vyvyan, touched by that kindly feeling which is apt to soften a man's heart when he is getting rid of a troublesome relative.

'You cannot want me, Vyvyan,' retorted Miss Penruth, in her severest voice. 'Don't let there be any pretending between us. You have new relations whose presence here has been made a perpetual insult to me. I leave the field open to those new relations. I yield to those new claims; and I hope—yes—whatever

I may feel as a woman, as a Christian I hope that the course you have taken may result in your happiness.'

She emphasised this speech with a deprecating shrug and a pensive elevation of her eyebrows, which implied that her fears were stronger than her hopes, gave her brother a frosty kiss, and then mounted the landau with an air of melancholy dignity which must have been equal to Madame Roland's ascent of the scaffold. Vyryan watched the carriage as it drove away, but he was rewarded by no backward look from his sister. She sat with her face towards Launceston, and her back resolutely turned upon the home of her childhood.

'In a better world I shall be better appreciated and better understood,' she said to herself; '*there* I may find my proper level.'

CHAPTER XLIII.

A NEW GENERATION.

CHRISTMAS came, and the three sturdy boys from St. Columb, red-nosed and red-eared after a journey outside the coach, in their father's care, arrived one frosty afternoon at Place. Mark had written to the schoolmistress to tell her that the boys were motherless; and that worthy person had, with due caution, informed her three pupils that their mother was in heaven—a fact which they accepted with singular equanimity, proceeding forthwith to inquire where they should spend their holidays. Not a tear was shed, till the eldest boy, inspired with a sudden terror, burst out into a lugubrious howl, and asked if his papa had gone to heaven too.

'We couldn't do without pa,' he said; 'pa used to tell us about Jack the Giant-killer, and play with us by the fire, and take us for rides round the field on his horse, and give us pennies.'

Loud was their delight when their father arrived one bleak windy morning, and announced that he was going to take them home for a week's holiday.

'Who minds the house and scolds Lucy, pa, now that ma's in heaven?' asked Jack, the eldest boy, when they were all three in their perch behind the coachman, Mark occupying the box-seat in front of them.

'You are not going to the cottage, Jack. That's shut up till somebody else wants to live there. You are going to a big house on the moors, ever so big.'

'Is that the house ma used to talk about when she was angry?' inquired Jack, who was of the little-pitcher age, and had tolerably long ears. 'The house she called Place?'

'Hush,' whispered Mark, putting up a warning finger, and with a side glance at the coachman, whose face had no more expression than a dead wall, but who might have been listening

to that shrill small voice all the same. 'You mustn't talk about your mother.'

'Why not? She's in heaven, Miss Powle says. Heaven is a nice place, isn't it?'

'Yes, yes.'

'Nicer than St. Columb?'

'Ever so much nicer.'

'And St. Columb is nicer than Camelot. We shall all go to heaven one day, Miss Powle says, and then we shall see ma again. I hope she won't scold us as much as she did at the cottage, and that we sha'n't have cold meat so often. Will there be washing-days in heaven?'

'No, no. You mustn't say such things, Jack.'

'I'm glad there'll be no washing-days, for we always had cold meat when there was washing.'

'You are going to a house where you'll have hot meat every day,' said Mark, patting the chubby cheeks; 'but you mustn't talk so much about your dinner. It sounds greedy.'

'I am greedy,' replied the little lad, with edifying candour. 'Everybody says so. I sold my comforter to Billy Blake for a wortleberry pasty. Miss Powle said I was as bad as Esau—you know what Esau did, don't you, pa?—but she said Billy was a mean boy, and she made him give me back the comforter. I couldn't give him back the pasty, for I'd eaten it, so I got the best of the bargain. Did God make Jacob give back Esau's birthright? If Billy was mean, Jacob was mean too, wasn't he?' argued the lad.

'You mustn't argue about your Bible, Jack. You must read it and ask no questions.'

'Ah, but there's a book we learn out of—*Bible Questions*. So you see you may ask questions about the Bible.'

'Proper questions, of course, Jack—such as are printed in books. Those may be asked. But you mustn't mix up Billy Blake and Jacob. That's wicked.'

'O,' said Jack, gravely acquiescent, 'then I'll read the Bible, and try not to think about what I've read, for fear I should mix up things.'

The first effect of the fine old Tudor house upon these youthful spirits was to awe and subdue them. They were dumb when Barbara welcomed them; they had not a word for Mrs. Trevor-nock or Flossie. They bit their thumbs—not in the defiant manner of Shakespeare's Sampson, but in absolute bewilderment of mind. They went about from room to room, clinging to their father's coat-tails, and gazing open-eyed and open-mouthed at the faded splendours which were to their unaccustomed eyes as solemnly grand as the vaulted aisles of a cathedral. They explored the stables, under the same paternal guidance, and timidly patted the sleek necks of unknown horses, and made acquaint-

ance with strange dogs, one of which acknowledged their juvenile attentions by an inward rattling sound of an alarming character, as if his whole internal economy were convulsed by wrath too deep to find utterance in vulgar barking.

But by the time the little lads had been two hours at Place, and had been refreshed with meat and drink, this salutary awe wore off, and left them bolder than brass. They had already discovered that the old oak banister-rail was a capital thing for sliding upon, and were making alternate descents, amidst peals of shrill laughter, when Vyvyan came in from his ride.

The sound of that childish mirth, the cluster of rosy cheeks in the dusky hall, moved him strangely. He felt no anger at this profanation of the quiet old house, only a thrill of sweetest hope. His children's laughter would be sounding thus, some day, he thought; his children's bright faces would greet him when he came home. O happy welcome, O sweet smiling future, which made all life seem new!

'Well, my little chaps,' he called out, with gruff good-nature, 'let's have a look at you!'

The laughter was hushed at the sight of this grim stranger. The boy in the act of sliding put the break on, and descended slowly, his eyes rounded in a solemn stare. The other two stood still at the foot of the old brown staircase.

'So you are all Penruths?' said Vyvyan, prodding Jack's red cheek with his bony finger.

'Yes; pa says we are to be called Penruth now. Our name was Peters till to-day. Ma was Mrs. Peters, but she's in heaven.'

'You mustn't talk of your mother here,' said Vyvyan, frowning.

'That's what pa told us,' said Jack. 'Is heaven a wicked place?'

'Heaven wicked—no!'

'O,' said Jack, looking puzzled, 'I thought perhaps it was a bad place, and that it was wicked of ma to go there, and that was why we mustn't talk about her.'

Phil, the second boy, and Harry, the baby, looked on open-eyed at this encounter, staring up at the tall gaunt uncle, and wondering who he was. Their father had told them a good deal about this unknown uncle, and had warned them how they were to behave to him: how they were not to chatter impudently, but only to answer when he spoke to them; for he was a very particular man, and was not used to children. And here was that irrepressible Jack arguing with this particular man on terms of equality! Phil, the prudent, gave him a nudge, and whispered that perhaps the strange gentleman was their uncle.

Vyvyan's quick ear caught the word.

'Yes, number two,' he said, looking down at the upturned wondering face, 'I'm your uncle, sure enough. And what's your name, my little man?'

‘Philip.’

‘And yours, number three?’

‘Harry.’

‘Good old family names, both of them; and you are Jack, I suppose, whom your father thinks such a philosopher. Well, Masters Jack, Phil, and Harry, welcome to Place. Make yourselves as happy as you can, in a quiet way.’

‘Were we being noisy when you came in?’ asked Jack.

‘Well, yes, there was a considerable riot.’

‘Miss Powle lets us make as much noise as that in recreation time, and says nothing. But we have to be quiet at our lessons.’

‘We make faces, though,’ said Harry, who could hardly speak plain, ‘and we pinch each other under the table.’

‘What a big house this is!’ exclaimed Jack, staring round him at the twilight hall, the panelled walls, and stags’ heads, and armour. ‘Is it yours?’

‘Yes, it is mine, so long as I live to own it.’

‘Why isn’t it pa’s as well as yours?’ asked Jack. ‘Brothers ought to share everything. Miss Powle says so when we have apples given us.’

‘Miss Powle doesn’t belong to the landed gentry, or she wouldn’t talk nonsense,’ answered the uncle.

‘What’s landed gentry?’

‘Jack,’ cried Phil, ‘pa said you were not to ask questions.’

‘You seem fond of your father, young ones,’ said Vyvyan.

‘Yes, we all love pa. Pa’s always kind. Ma was cross—sometimes.’

‘Vevy offen,’ said the baby.

‘Only on washing-days—or when we tore our clothes,’ said Phil deprecatingly. ‘Jack, you know ma’s in heaven, and it’s rude to talk about her. If you don’t mind us sliding down the banisters, uncle, we’ll go on playing.’

‘I think,’ said Vyvyan gravely, ‘that banisters which were made in Cromwell’s time were never meant to be slid upon. Besides which you might break your necks. Come with me, youngsters, and I’ll find some one to amuse you.’

He marched the boys off to the drawing-room, where Barbara and her mother were talking together in the deep embrasure of a window, while Mark and Flossie played draughts at a little table near the fire; Flossie rabidly eager for kings, and dashing through the enemy’s ranks with reckless gallantry, which generally resulted in the wholesale slaughter of her men.

‘What do you mean by abandoning these poor little chaps to their own devices?’ asked Vyvyan, coming to his own particular chair by the fire, while Barbara rose to greet him with that gentle reverence for his graver age which seemed more the manner of a dutiful daughter than a wife.

He bent down to kiss the pale thoughtful brow.

'Yes, dear, ever so much better for my ride,' he answered to her murmured inquiry. 'The moorland air will soon blow back the old strength. And you, darling,—what have you and your mother been doing all the afternoon?'

'We've been so amused with the little boys,' replied Mrs. Trevornock, 'and their surprise at the house. It is quite a pleasure to hear their young voices; and it makes one think—'

'Of a day when there may be the sound of still younger voices,' said Vyvyan. 'Yes, I thought of that when I heard their laughter.'

'Do you think they are like the family?' asked Mark timidly, as if it were audacious to make such a suggestion.

'Yes; I can see a look of my father in those young faces—a curious half-comic likeness—the face of middle age hinted at in the rosy cheeks and blue eyes of the child. Yes, they are genuine Penruths, Mark; and we must take care they are brought up so as to do honour to the good old name.'

The three boys stood in a row before the fire, gravely allowing themselves to be roasted, rather than offend the particular uncle by too much locomotion. Flossie, seeing how stupid and helpless they looked, and perceiving that complete annihilation would be the lot of her men, or ever she was able to crown one of them, was moved to pity the children.

'Come and have a romp in the picture-gallery,' she said, 'and then you shall have some tea. I think I'll give you the game, Mark, if you've no objection.'

'I think you've lost it,' retorted Mark, laughing; and then he went off with them for a game at hide-and-seek in the long gallery, out of which the bedrooms opened.

From that time forward Flossie was the children's prime favourite. They liked Barbara, who was always gentle and tender to them, but whose face had a look of settled sadness which kept them aloof. They loved Mrs. Trevornock, who had a pleasant way of loading their plates with all the most bilious things on the table, and who saved platefuls of dessert to carry up to their room and administer to them at bedtime, whereby they went to bed in a sticky and semi-glutinous state, their cheeks and chins smeared with preserved ginger and other confectionery, and fell asleep with their mouths full of macaroons; but they positively idolised Flossie, who romped with them and told them stories, and gloried in all their most mischievous tricks, and was more impish in her ways than any of them.

'There isn't a boy at Miss Powle's equal to you,' said Jack. 'How I wish you went to school there! Wouldn't she go on at you!'

'Do you think I should lead her a life, Jack?' asked Flossie, pleased at this compliment.

'I believe you'd send her daft,' said Jack. 'She cocks her bonnet up at the back so high that some folks say she isn't quite right in her head; but if she had you to worry her she'd cock it higher, and then they'd put her in Bodrmin Asylum.'

'Wouldn't that be fun?' asked Harry, with juvenile hard heartedness.

'Well, come now, she might be a worse old woman,' remonstrated Phil, 'though the plums in our Wednesday pudding are almost too far off to halloo to each other.'

'I've christened it beetle-pudding,' said Jack; 'for it looks more like a lump of dough in which half a dozen black-beetles had gone astray than a genuine plum-pudding.'

'You shall have a genuine plum-pudding to-morrow,' said Flossie—'such a pudding, such a turkey, such mince-pies! How dreadfully ill you will all be next day!'

'It's worth being ill for once in a way, if one can have one's fill of Christmas pudding,' retorted that young sensualist Jack. 'Mrs. Gilmore's making the pudding now. I ran into the kitchen and saw her at it, and we're all to give it a stir before we go to bed to-night, for luck.'

'Ma never let us stir the pudding,' said Phil. 'She used to be cross on Christmas-eve because pa wasn't with us. Sometimes Aunt Jooly used to come and bring us nuts and tell us stories; but we never had much fun.'

CHAPTER XLIV

SWEETER THAN MARRIAGE BELLS.

CHRISTMAS had come and gone, and the new year had begun. Mark's three boys were back at school. They had departed regretfully from a land overflowing with treacle and clotted cream, otherwise thunder and lightning, but not wholly unblest; for Gilmore, the old housekeeper, had packed for them such a hamper as only the luckiest boys take back to school; and Flossie had driven them down to the lodge where the St. Columb coach was to pick them up, and had stuffed their pockets with sweetmeats; and what with tips from Vyvyan and Barbara and Mrs. Trevornock, they had departed, as it were, in a shower of halferowns. Mark went back with them, having certain explanations to make to Miss Powle, who had known her pupils hitherto by the name of Peters, and who was henceforth to cherish and honour them as Penruths.

A day or two after the little boys left, Mrs. Trevornock and her younger daughter set off on their long wintry journey, Flossie elated at the idea of seeing shop-windows again.

'How I shall enjoy a walk down Regent-street, if I can but get that lazy mother of mine to go with me!' she said. 'Even

the Road will be lovely. I wonder whether the fashions will have changed since we left Camberwell! One thing was settled before we came away; a crinoline is indispensable. Miue is only a weak invention of the dressmaker. I must get a real one directly I go back.'

'You will be kind to him, won't you, mother darling?' said Barbara, when she and her mother were having their last five minutes' loving talk together in her dressing-room, Mrs. Trevornock wrapped up to the chin in her daughter's Christmas gift of sables.

'Kind to him, Barbara!' ejaculated the mother, whose thoughts were full of an approaching event, and who had made up her mind that the coming stranger was to be a boy. 'Kind to your baby! Why, I shall worship him!'

'No, mamma dear; you don't understand,' said Barbara, pale and grave to sadness. 'I was speaking of Major Leland. He is to be with you next week, Flossie says; and he has so much need of care and kindness.'

'My dear child, I will do everything—everything that affection can do to make up to him for all he lost in losing you. But, O my love, I am so thankful to God things happened as they did! To have had you in India during that fearful time! I never went to bed at night after reading of those agonising scenes without thanking God you were not there. It might have been, Barbara. You might have been sacrificed, like so many brave true hearted wives, and innocent unconscious children. God has been very good to me.'

'And you will be good to him, mother—to him who avenged those innocent victims, who held his own life as nothing, and who, I fear, has lost it. I saw death in his face,' she said, stifling a sob; 'and I should like to think that his last days were spent peacefully with you and Flossie, and in the garden where we were so happy. And, mother, if he were dying, and wished to see me again—as he might perhaps—I would come at that sad hour—come at any hazard—to hold his hand at the last—hear his last sigh.'

'You would not disobey your husband, dear. He has been so good.'

'Yes, he is good; he has a noble heart. I believe he would let me come.'

'You mustn't give way to such sorrowful ideas, pet,' urged Mrs. Trevornock soothingly. 'Major Leland is going to get well and strong again, and to go back to India and be made a General of the Sudder Dewanee,' she added, having vague ideas of Indian distinction, derived from half-heard descriptions of places and people, dimly comprehended by a mind troubled, like Martha's, about many things. 'We are going to give him the strongest beef-tea, and calves'-foot jelly, and eggs beaten up in

sherry, and I know we shall cure him of all the mischief done by that dreadful bullet. So you must be cheerful, dearest, and only think of pleasant things.'

'The carriage is waiting, if you please, ma'am,' announced Gilmore; and Mrs. Trevornock, who knew that the coach would not wait more than five minutes even for people of distinction, blessed and embraced her daughter, gathered up handbag, umbrella, cloak, and other oddments, and, aided by Gilmore, conveyed herself down-stairs to the hall, where Flossie was talking to Vyvyan and Mark in quite a family party.

It was a hard thing for Mrs. Trevornock to leave her daughter just at this time, but Barbara had so set her heart upon the carrying out of Flossie's scheme with regard to Major Leland, that the mother was fain to give way.

'He needs you more than I can, mother,' she had whispered. 'God will take care of me.'

They were gone, and the old mansion seemed painfully silent without Flossie's rippling laughter, and the rustle of her silk flounces, and the air of movement and brightness which one frivolous young woman was able to impart to life in a quiet country house. But even in its stillness, in the gray winter days, Place was a happier home than it had been before calamity so nearly wrecked it. Barbara and her husband were more united than they had ever been—united by a hope and an expectancy which filled the mind of both. Vyvyan's grave tenderness would have won grateful affection from a more stubborn heart than Barbara's. She had seen him dying, as she believed, the victim of a mysterious doom; she had held him in her arms when the death-damps were gathering on his brow; had watched beside him as he came slowly back to life; and in those awful hours she had counted over the sum of his goodness to her.

'If he should die and never know that I am grateful to him!' she said to herself at that time. And again: 'What have I ever done to prove my gratitude?'

And now he was well again, quite the old Vyvyan, a rough-hewn figure, a rugged face; but that stern countenance was made beautiful by eyes that could kindle with tenderness when they looked at the fair young wife on the verge of womanhood's great ordeal. How deep was that love when, one March midnight, after he had been pacing the long gallery for hours with muffled feet, noiseless save for the loud beating of his heart, Didcott's familiar voice called him to his wife's dressing-room, and, in the rosy firelight, in a cradle festooned with soft snowy drapery, Vyvyan Penruth saw the round pink face of his first-born, and a pair of luminous eyes, more beautiful than he had supposed it possible for human eyes to be, looking boldly up at him. A being which had no existence an hour ago was here to claim and hold his own as Penruth of Place. The

distant bells rang out across the windy sky while the father still stood at gaze, wondering that so fair a creature could be mortal, and still more that it could belong to him. Mark had ridden off through the darkness to set the bells ringing by ringers forewarned and ready; Mark had shown honest hearty joy at the birth of the heir.

This was the beginning of a new stage in Barbara's existence. It was almost as if the old purposeless life, so empty of real happiness, had been blotted out, and she had entered a world where all things were new. The vanished gladness of her youth was renewed to her in this innocent young life; the future, so dim and formless before, took shape and meaning. The future meant Baby Vyvyan, and Baby Vyvyan's joys and sorrows, failures and triumphs. The young mother's thoughts, which a little while ago had been so dull and stagnant, went rippling gaily down the river of years to the far-away point where the widening stream of boyhood runs into the broad ocean of mature life. She had something to hope for, something to dream of, in the days that were to come. All her being, all her power to love and suffer, to hope and rejoice, was not to be buried with the old lover, whose life was slowly, but surely, ebbing to its dark close, far off in the old familiar home.

Yes, George Leland's days were numbered, and the number of them was dwindling to a point. Barbara had heard of him from her mother and Flossie very constantly since he had been an inmate of the house in South-lane. Sometimes the letters had been full of hopefulness; the dark shadow of impending doom had been lifted for a little while, and all was sunshine. Major Leland had been wonderfully well; he had walked up and down the pathway by the hazels for an hour, enjoying his cigar. He had gone with Flossie for a stroll in the Walworth-road, and had bought her some lovely gloves, and had made fun of the bonnets in Mrs. Jones's window; and he had eaten with more appetite during the last few days, and had declared that Mrs. Trevornock's mock-turtle soup was nicer than the real turtle at the Governor-General's table.

'He is very happy with us,' Flossie wrote in her last letter. 'He never goes to London, to his clubs. He is not strong enough to face the east winds; and we seem to have nothing but east winds nowadays. Some of his club friends have been down to see him, men who were through the Mutiny, and it has been quite delightful to hear them talk of their adventures. One young ensign was evidently struck with *me*. They are all indignant about the Delhi prize-money, of which nobody has yet received sixpence; though the treasures of ever so many native jewellers, who had hidden their property when the Sepoys got possession of the city, were dug up after the siege—uncut sapphires and rubies and cat's-eyes—wouldn't you delight in

being the owner of a fine cat's-eye, so distinguished, you know? —gems of untold value. Shawls too, and embroidery of gorgeous colours, velvet, silk. It makes one's mouth water to hear about such things. But these brave devoted soldiers are to have nothing. To hear of such injustice is enough to make one turn Radical, and insist upon the five points of the Charter, though you know, dear, that I am a stanch Conservative, and have always considered Radical opinions the essence of vulgarity.'

Then had come other letters, sad in tone, which told of failing strength, sleepless nights, days of pain and restlessness.

'A celebrated London doctor came down to see him yesterday,' wrote Mrs. Trevornock. 'It was at his sister's wish, to please his people in Somersetshire; for he is quite satisfied himself with Mr. Asplatt, the gentleman who attended me, and whom you may remember.'

Might remember! Poor Barbara! Could she ever forget those dreary days of her mother's illness, which had made an epoch in her life, the days in which she had brought herself calmly to face the greatest sacrifice a child can make to filial duty, the sacrifice of a woman's fealty to her love?

'He is perfectly satisfied with Mr. Asplatt, who is most attentive, but on his sister's account he gave way and sent for Dr. Styles, whom Mr. Asplatt recommended as the great authority on this particular complaint. Dr. Styles and Mr. Asplatt saw him together, and had a long talk afterwards in the next room, and then Mr. Asplatt told me Dr. Styles's opinion. You have asked me to hide nothing from you, darling, to tell you the actual truth, however cruel that truth may be, and I feel it my sad duty to obey you. The doctors have no hope, dearest. Everything is being done that can be done; but a long period of exposure and privation, severest fatigue, heat and cold, has had a fatal effect on Major Leland's constitution. The bullet which pierced his chest at Lucknow he might have recovered from, terrible as the wound was, for the lungs were untouched; but the suffering he had undergone previously had sapped his strength, and there was no power of complete recovery. The voyage home prolonged his life, but the seeds of disease were deeply rooted, and neither rest nor medicine could restore the strength he wasted so recklessly in the weary days of the Mutiny. He may linger for weeks, or even months, but he will never be well again. He knows this, dear, and waits for the end with beautiful resignation. I cannot tell you how dear he has grown to Flossie and me in this sad time, and what a consolation it has been to us to nurse and care for him. His sisters were anxious to come to him, but he wrote to beg them not. He had wished them all good-bye when he was in Somersetshire, he told them, and for them to meet again would be only to prolong sorrow.'

This letter arrived towards the end of April, when Vyvyan

Barbara.

the younger was just four weeks old, and when the window in Barbara's dressing-room was all abloom with spring flowers; the colours and perfume of which were supposed to have already engaged the infant's attention, and to have set his budding faculties in motion. If he opened his eyes a little wider than usual he was supposed to be 'taking notice'; a feeble smile was accepted as evidence of profound thought; a chuckle was taken for a burst of wit; so fondly did mother and father watch for the dawn of reason. On this fair April day, when all things had a happy look, Barbara sat by the window robed in white, pale as a saint in an old Flemish picture, the baby lying in her lap, and her mother's letter in her hand.

Vyvyan the elder came in while she was reading it.

'How sad your face is!' he said. 'I hope there is no bad news in your letter?'

'Only news I have been expecting for a long time,' she answered quietly, handing him the letter as she spoke.

He read it from the first line to the last with a face that was full of thought, but not of anger. Twice he glanced from the letter to his wife, as she sat looking up at him with sorrowful eyes and parted lips.

'Would it make you happier to see him again before he dies? Would it be any comfort to you to bid him good-bye?' he asked.

'Vyvyan, how did you know, how could you guess? That is the favour I wanted to ask you.'

'I could read as much in your face. Well, I will be no churl to him at the last, though he was happier than I in winning your love.'

'My first love, Vyvyan,' she said gently, giving him her hand.

'What! Is there a second version of the same story? Is it possible for a woman to love twice?'

'I have learned to love you,' she answered. 'I think I have been stony-hearted and slow to win, but your patient goodness has conquered even my cold heart. Do you despise my love, Vyvyan, because it has come so late?'

'Despise your love, my treasure, my delight!' he cried, kneeling by her side. 'If a rough-hewn fellow like me could find words to express idolatry, I would tell you the value I set upon your love. I have been your faithful slave, Barbara, from the hour I first saw you. I should have been your slave to the last, had you treated me ever so badly. And now, dear, if you are very sure that it will be a consolation to you to see Major Leland once more—remember how full of pain such partings are—we will go to London as soon as you are strong enough to travel. I owe him some recompense, poor fellow; for I fear I was sadly wanting in gratitude that night when he dragged this weary body and soul of mine out of the jaws of death. I thought life such a worthless boon just then that I resented his impertinence in forcing the gift upon me. Now, now that his

is worth having, I can afford to thank him for his pluck and readiness.'

So it was settled between husband and wife, without further discussion, that they should go to London and spend a week or two at a West-end hotel, so soon as Barbara should feel capable of taking such a journey. Gilmore, who had been promoted to the office of nurse, and who believed that no such infant as Vyvyan Penruth had ever yet adorned the earth by his presence, was to accompany her mistress in charge of that wonderful baby.

'Vyvyan,' said Barbara, looking up at him with earnest eyes when this journey had been decided, 'there is nothing you have ever done for me—and you have loaded me with benefits—which has so proved to me the goodness of your heart as this act of to-day.'

CHAPTER XLV

THE FORTUNE OF WAR.

IN these glad spring days, the season of Proserpine's rough wooing, when the borders were glorious with yellow daffodils, George Leland was just able to creep slowly up and down the garden-walk, leaning on his stout bamboo-cane, and sheltered from east winds by the vine-clad wall—just able to travel at slowest pace, stopping every now and then to take breath, from one end of that half-acre pleasure-ground to the other. To these narrow bounds had he come at last; he who, a year and a half ago, thought it a trifle to ride seventy miles between dawn and midnight; he who had been first among the young athletes at Shrewsbury. It had come to this: two roods of garden at a halting pace in the midday sun; and for all the rest of his day the dull confinement of a sick-room, and for his nights sleepless-ness or harrowing dreams.

He knew that he was to die, and he had resigned himself long ago to his fate—had, indeed, taught himself to think that death was better than life, since he had so little to leave or to lose. Yet there were times when the old fire flashed from his dark eyes, when his heart beat loud and fast at the vision of what might have remained for him to do had life been longer; most of all at the thought of his native regiment, the wild hillmen, soldiers of his own making, who, when they joined him at Delhi after long severance, pressed round him and leaped about him like a pack of foxhounds round a beloved master, kissing his hands and feet, his bridle, his stirrup-leathers. With those faithful fellows he had done some wonderful things in the plain before Delhi, where his very name had been a terror to the foe.

He had cut his way to fame and honour with his sword.

Money he had never valued, and twelve years' unparalleled work had brought him but little of this world's gear or gain. He had flattered no patron, cringed to no authority, military or civil. Through the dark cloud of an unmerited disgrace he had come steadily to the front; and had been, for his age and standing, one of the foremost men in India when a Sepoy's bullet, fired from a dark corner of a deserted palace, made a sudden end of a career that had promised so much.

'Fortune of war,' he said to himself, as he lay on the sofa where he and Barbara had sat side by side, bending over Hindostanee exercises or playing chess, in the happy days that were gone. Ah, what games at chess those were, when lovely eyes lifted shyly to his made him forget to castle just at that critical moment in which castling meant victory; or when the tremulous touch of a little hand checkmated him more completely than queen and bishop, knight and pawn. Such vile playing, such happy players! It was all over. The Crimean war had been fought; the great Sepoy rebellion had smoldered and blazed, and had been extinguished, not without glory, not without loss, and Church and State were rejoicing at the restoration of peace in that far-away empire. Cabinets had gone out and come in; everybody was growing old and gray and grave: the story of life was over, and here came death with the last chapter.

He was a wonderfully patient invalid, though his disease was one in which death does not come painlessly. He had hours of suffering, hours of ease. The first he bore with silence, and troubled no one with his pain. In his easy hours he was almost the George Leland of old; and Flossie, who was his constant nurse and companion, sometimes found herself forgetting how swiftly the dark end was bearing down upon them. If he was patient and resigned, his young nurse was heroic also after her own fashion; for when her heart was sorest, she contrived to be cheerful.

'What good you do me, little Flossie!' George Leland said to her one sunny morning as they were slowly pacing the narrow walk, his lean brown hand resting on her shoulder. 'How could I have borne these slow hours of decay without you?'

'You would have had your sisters,' said Flossie, blushing at his praise.

'They are very good, and would have been skilful nurses, I daresay; but they would not have reminded me of Barbara, they do not belong to the happiest time of my life, as you do. You seem part of a bygone happiness, Flossie; a link in the chain of that golden past, which I brood upon and dream about now when earth's future lies within such narrow limits. Men whose days are numbered love to dwell upon the past. Memory serves them instead of hope. No, Flossie, my sisters could never be to me what you are. Even the house in which

this body of mine was born is not so dear to me as the house where my heart found its first and only mistress. That was a second birth which counts for more than the first. Then, again, my sisters, all but Marian, have other interests—husband, children. Even Marian has her Sunday-school and all the poor of the parish under her protection. She could never be such a companion to me as you have been.'

'I am so glad,' faltered Flossie 'I only wish you were going to be with us always.'

'To turn your house into a hospital for incurables,' said Major Leland, with a smile half sad, half tender. 'You are generous enough even for that, I believe. If I had come back from India a truncated creature, the mere hulk of a man, yet in excellent health, and warranted to live to eighty, you would have taken me in and cherished my poor carcass, and devoted yourself to making life tolerable to a lump of infirmity. Happily, my love, the complaint I suffer from is not without a cure.'

Flossie looked at him interrogatively, with tearful eyes.

'Death, dear, the sovereign remedy for all diseases. Don't cry, my pet. If—if—I could see her again, just once more look into those lovely eyes, feel the touch of that gentle hand, I think I could say with Manfred,

"'Tis not so terrible to die."

'You shall see her; she shall come to you!' cried Flossie. 'I will write to her to-day.'

'Not for the world!' cried George Leland. 'She has a new care, a new love—her son! If she would leave her husband to come to me, she would not leave her son.'

'She shall leave all the world, for your sake; just to see you once more, just to clasp your hand. She told mother she would come if you asked for her; and you have asked, and she shall come.'

'She shall come, for the end is drawing near,' thought Flossie, full of sadness.

Every morning, let the sun shine ever so brightly, or the air be ever so balmy, she could see how the little walk across two roods of ground cost the sick man a sharper effort; how the hollow cheek grew hollower, and the unnatural lustre of the eye less like the brightness of health.

CHAPTER XLVI.

RED CLOTH AND OLIVE-LEAVES.

THEY had made up a bed for Major Leland in the garden-parlour, and had thrown open the folding-doors between the two rooms. His complaint was one in which fresh air was

essential, and Mrs. Trevornock gladly sacrificed the daily order of her house to his comfort. She and Flossie could be anywhere, she said naïvely, when the invalid protested against this usurpation of the two sitting-rooms. The kitchen was quite good enough for them to take their meals in.

‘Indeed, we are very fond of the kitchen,’ said Flossie. ‘In the old days we used to sit there sometimes, for pleasure, when Amelia had an evening out.’

The ‘old days’ meant the time before Mrs. Trevornock’s income was supplemented by three hundred a year from Cornwall. There had been certain improvements and alterations in the little domicile since this expansion of means, which leant rather to ceremony and refinement than to actual homely comfort; and Flossie sometimes alluded with a sigh to that less wealthy period of her life, when it had seemed a natural thing for her to sit in the kitchen.

It was the beginning of May, and weather fairer than May often brings—sunshine as warm as early June. Flossie had found one adventurous lily of the valley unfolding its waxen petals in the shady angle of the wall, and had brought it triumphantly to the Major, who lay on his sofa by the open window, and fancied to-day that his two roods of pathway would be almost an impossible journey.

‘A little later, dear,’ he said, when Flossie proposed their usual walk. ‘I know it is the loveliest morning we have had yet. The blackbird in his wicker cage next door has been telling me so repeatedly since sunrise; but I hardly feel equal to my constitutional just yet.’

‘Do you see this?’ asked Flossie, holding up the lily.

‘Barbara’s favourite flower! Yes; I remember, the first night we drank tea together in this room, there was a bunch of lilies of the valley on the table, and you two girls had each a cluster of the same flower in your belts. You were yourselves as fair and pure as lilies, and I fancied I had come into a world of flowers and simple innocent things. How happy we were that evening!’

‘Happy!’ echoed Flossie. ‘I can’t make out how it was ever in us to be so ridiculously happy. But you see, after growing up almost strangers to masculine society, it was something stupendous to find ourselves with an officer actually our own property. For you seemed quite to belong to us by the time we had finished tea.’

‘When I am dead, Flossie,’ said George Leland, who had been looking dreamily out of the window while the girl talked, ‘I should like some one who has cared for me a little to lay a bunch of lilies of the valley in my coffin. Will you do it?’

‘Don’t talk like that,’ cried Flossie, bursting into tears. ‘They will be out of season long before then.’

'I doubt it, dear. I think that the lilies and I may go out of season together.'

Two days ago she had talked of writing to her sister. Nothing had been said about Barbara since then. George Leland had asked no question of his devoted nurse; but more than once she had seen his eyes resting interrogatively upon her face, she had marked a nervous expectation in his manner when there was knocking or ringing at the front door.

'Let me read you to sleep,' said Flossie, grieved at his restlessness on this particular morning.

Nothing seemed to interest or amuse him. His books, his papers, were looked at and flung aside. His attention evidently wandered all the time she talked to him. Mrs. Trevornock's kind face, looking in at the door now and then to see how he was going on, did not win from him the usual smile, the usual friendly greeting. His thoughts were astray. He was even fretful and impatient—he who had never before been so since the beginning of his illness.

'Let me read you to sleep,' repeated Flossie, opening a volume of Byron. 'You generally do fall asleep when I read poetry. I am very glad of it, for it's good for you, though it's not a compliment to my reading.'

'Very well, dear. Half an hour's sleep would be a boon. My thoughts and fancies would not let me sleep last night, and the blackbird kept me awake this morning.'

'That blackbird must be murdered, or sent away,' said Flossie. 'I know you like the *Giaour*, don't you?'

'Infinitely.'

'Perhaps you prefer the *Corsair*.'

'No, let us have the *Giaour*. The gentleman's moral character may be open to question, but he knew how to love.'

'We'll skip the description of Greece,' said Flossie, with whom worship of nature was not a strong point, 'and come to the pith of the story.'

And then she began, 'Who thundering comes on blackest steed?' and warmed with her subject. As she went on, her cheeks glowed and her eyes kindled, and she read just a little less vilely than the average schoolgirl.

George Leland loved his Byron. In that wild hill-life of his, in many a lonely night under canvas, with the covering of his tent drawn back to admit the glow of the fire outside, and no prospect but the black sky, or the visage of an occasional jackal, or a possible tiger, peering at him across the flames, he had sat in the red light reading one of the few books he could contrive to carry about with him in his nomadic life. The want of many books had been a trouble to him in his rare intervals of leisure; and his half dozen volumes, Shakespeare, Byron, Shelley, Plutarch, *Don Quixote*, and the Bible, had grown all

the dearer to him because they formed the beginning and the end of his library.

He knew that passionate tale by heart, and could have repeated it more fluently than Flossie read. He lay listening with half-closed eyes. The wild horseman, the reckless rider, the skilled swordsman, the true lover, yes, here was a hero, faulty, no doubt, but with whom George Leland could sympathise.

As a sedative nothing could have been better than Flossie's reading. She had a strong sense of the swing in the verse, and she gave a gentle up and down accent to the metre, like the lapping of summer wavelets against a sea-wall, or the drip, drip of a fountain.

The invalid had had a bad night; and after listening lazily for a little while his chin sank upon his breast, and a gentle refreshing sleep stole over him just as the insect queen of eastern spring was rising on its purple wing.

There was a sulphur-hued butterfly flitting across the open window while Flossie read, one of the first of the year's butterflies. The Persian lilacs in front of the house were in bloom, and the hawthorns were in bud. All the air was full of sweet odours, and the warm sunshine comforted the sleeper like a draught of strong wine.

He slept better than he had slept for some days, for his slumbers of late had been fitful and brief. For a little while he could hear Flossie's voice flowing on like a drowsy rivulet deep in the heart of a wood, and then he was verily in dreamland, where there were other voices and other faces.

He was in India again, in the cantonments before Delhi. Yonder above the ridge glittered the tall minarets of the Jumma Musjid, the chief mosque, dominating all lesser and lower buildings from its rocky eminence in the heart of the city. Old comrades and old friends were round him. The faces of the dying—and how many a brave soldier had perished from sword or sickness in that dreary time of waiting!—looked up at him with the sad farewell smile. Then he fancied himself in the thick of a sudden skirmish before the walls of the city, all hurry and confusion, the black faces of the Pandies grinning through the smoke of their guns, the scarlet turbans and sashes of his own horsemen making spots of colour in the gloom.

Then the smoke rolled away, the golden pinnacles of mosque and palace melted into the blue of an English April sky, daffodils were blowing, blackbirds whistling, and Barbara and he were in the garden hand in hand.

The little hand lay in his. He clasped it, and it had a substance never felt in dreams—a hand that trembled in his, a living hand that tenderly returned his fond pressure.

'Barbara!' he cried; and then he started out of sleep and

saw her kneeling beside his bed, pale as a snowdrop, with tearful eyes uplifted to his face.

'Barbara, my love! O, how good, how pitiful of you to come!'

'Did you think I should stay away when I heard that you had asked for me?'

'No, dearest, I thought you would come; I could not sleep last night for the thought of your coming. I lay awake and listened to the ticking of my watch, counting the minutes that must pass before I could see you. And to-day at every sound I fancied you were on the threshold. Yet when you really came I was lying like a log, and knew nothing. How long have you been in the room?'

'Five minutes at the most. I heard you were asleep, and crept softly in to wait for your waking. Even if you had not asked for me, I should have come. I had Vyvyan's leave to come to you. Our journey had been arranged before Flossie's letter came. It was Vyvyan's own idea. He is in the house. He wants to thank you for saving his life. He was not himself that day when you were at Place, and now he feels that he must have seemed ungrateful.'

'I did no more than I would have done for a stranger, Barbara. He owes me no thanks.'

'He and I think otherwise. But for you he might have died, died of poison. It is too horrible to think of. But for you! O, thank God you were near us, thank God you were able to help us!'

'You have a son, Barbara,' said George Leland, after a brief silence. 'Flossie told me.'

'Yes; he is the dearest creature. Will you see him by and by, if—if it will not worry you?'

'It will delight me. I shall feel such joy as Simeon felt. Ah, Barbara, sometimes in my dreams far away I have pictured you with your son lying in your arms, fair as the Mother of God. Idle dreams, foreshadowing happiness that was never to be mine. Sit beside my pillow, love—there, in your sister's chair—so that I can see your face. Such meetings and such partings must come in many lives, I suppose; but they wrench a man's heartstrings. And yet I saw so much of pain and parting in the East that I fancied I had worn out my capacity for pity, and now I am pitying myself because I must leave the world in which you live.'

'George!'

'Do you remember that morning at Southampton when I saw your sweet pale face at the station; when you called my name with a little choking cry, and then fell fainting on my shoulder? Barbara, looking back at that morning I am sorry I did not change the whole plan of my existence, give up every hope of fame and honour, hazard even the stigma of poltroonery,

so that I might stay in England and make you my wife. What can life give a man better than happiness, and you and I might have been happy? Yes, love, we might. We should have begun life as paupers; but I would have found some way of winning our bread, the hope and energy within me would have made it easy. So happy a man must have succeeded. Barbara, I was a fool to part from you that morning!

'Dear George, you know you did what was right. You took the only course possible. Could I have esteemed you had you been so weak as to sacrifice your profession for my sake?'

'You would have loved me for the love that made me weak. No, sweetest, you are wise and right. I could not have sacrificed my calling without sacrificing my honour. God meant me to be a soldier. And I did good work yonder; there is comfort in that. The work done will remain when I am dust.'

He lay back upon his pillow for a little while with closed eyes. Then came a painful fit of coughing, and Barbara's gentle hand wiped the perspiration from his brow, and gave him the lemonade that stood ready on the table by his sofa.

'I should like to see your husband,' he said presently, when he had recovered from the exhaustion that followed the cough. 'I want to thank him for bringing you.'

'He shall come to you this moment.'

She went to the door and called Flossie. Penruth of Place had been sitting meekly in the neat little kitchen with Mrs. Trevornock; Amelia scrubbing at her pots and pans in the adjacent scullery, and singing. 'Ever of thee I'm faw-aw-awndly dreaming,' in a voice subdued in harmony with the pervading quiet of the house.

'Ask Vyvyan to come, Flossie,' whispered Barbara; and the Squire came silently and stood beside his dying rival's sofa, looking down at him with grave pitying eyes, as a man in the fulness and vigour of strength newly restored might look at fading manhood.

'I am sorry to see you brought so low,' he said, with unusual gentleness.

'Do not be sorry for me. I had very little to live for—except duty. I have had twelve years of that; and perhaps have done harder work in those twelve years than many men do in a long life. I don't think my life has been quite useless and purposeless—and—' with a smile—'I have had enough of it. I am glad to go to the land where the wicked cease from troubling, and the weary are at rest.'

'I want to thank you for saving my life. I treated you churlishly that day, for I fancied life was not worth keeping. But, God be praised, I have learnt a new lesson since then. I thank you from my soul. But for you I believe I should be lying in my grave.'

‘How shall I thank you for bringing your wife here to-day?’

‘I need no thanks. I brought her as I would have brought her to her brother, for I know that she is pure and true, and I have faith in the man who snatched me from the jaws of death.’

Vyvyan and Barbara left the sick-room after this, and Flossie resumed her accustomed seat near the sofa. The doctors had said that the invalid was to have plenty of repose. He might have cheerful society, and should be amused as much as possible; but there must be intervals of silence and rest.

‘I have some people to call upon in London, Barbara,’ said Mr. Penruth, in the hall. ‘You can stop with your mother. I’ll come back in the evening to take you to the hotel, or you can stay here to-night, if you prefer it.’

She only answered with a loving pressure of the hand he had laid upon her shoulder. She looked at him gratefully, with eyes in which there was pathos too deep for tears; and so in silence he left her. Mrs. Trevornock was up-stairs with Gilmore and the baby-heir, offering worship to that piece of infantine perfection. The house was very quiet. Barbara looked round her with a vague feeling, as if she had suddenly found herself there in a dream. Slowly and gradually the memory of her last morning at home came back to her, a gray and chilly picture: the sunless spring morning, the stern-visaged bridegroom; her mother’s trembling hands helping to arrange her simple bridal attire; all the joylessness of that day which should have been brimming over with joy. With what a fond regret she had looked back at the past, standing on the brink of a new life! With what shuddering aversion she had shrunk from every thought of the future!

And now the years had come and gone, not all unhappy, and she was reconciled to the grim husband and the lonely home; and there was a new sunshine that lighted up the dull gray life into beauty, and filled the future with promise.

‘I can never be unhappy while my darling is with me, and I can never forget my husband’s goodness to-day,’ she said to herself.

She looked at the little hall, with its simple adornments: an engraving after Landseer, the ‘Shepherd’s Prayer,’ a late acquisition of Mrs. Trevornock’s; the bowl of wallflowers on the mahogany slab. How small everything looked, and how ridiculously modern, after the low wide rooms at Place, the sombre panelling, the dusky old pictures, the gleaming armour, and faded arras!

Yet there was a tenderness in her heart for this old home which was almost pain.

‘O the happy struggling life,’ she thought, ‘when a five-pound note was rapture, and a tax-paper despair! Am I the same woman who used to set out with Flossie to buy tea and sugar, and to come back in the gloaming to see the fire burn-

ing merrily, as we came round the curve of the lane, and the dusky outline of mother sitting beside the hearth waiting for us?

There was a little side-door leading into the garden. She went out and walked slowly across the daisy-sprinkled grass, her mind full of memories.

There were the two basket chairs in which she and Flossie had spent so many summer afternoons, reading or working, before George Leland's coming, and where, afterwards, he and Barbara had sat side by side reading Byron, or talking of the future that was to be theirs far away in the shadow of the Himalayas, building castles and planning a life of impossible happiness.

She sank into one of the chairs, weary with the weight of sadness. He was dying. Flossie had told her what the doctor had said yesterday. His life was now only a question of days and hours. He might linger for a week, he might die before the night. Nothing more could be done to prolong the struggle. The end was inevitable.

'So good, so brave, so true!' she thought; 'and to-morrow there may be no such man as George Leland upon this earth—a memory only, a dear and cherished name.'

At this thought the tears came. She gave herself up to a passionate burst of grief; she fell on her knees upon the grass, and hid her face upon her folded arms in an attitude that looked like prayer.

She knew not how long she had been kneeling thus when a hand lightly touched her shoulder, and looking up she saw George Leland standing by her side leaning on his stick.

'Barbara, my love, you must not regret me,' he said gently. 'You do not know how happy I am; yes, completely happy. To have you here at the last, to know that your husband is stanch and good, and loves you with a worthy love—is not all this enough to make death easy? Do you think I am sorry because I have not been allowed to go on living to feebleness and gray hairs, to be lifted on my horse by a couple of troopers, or to have to ask an aide-de-camp which way my men are facing, because my own old eyes are too blind to see? I have seen veterans commanding armies when it would have been better for themselves and their country they were under the sod. I shall not live to the useless age, Barbara.'

His eye brightened and his hollow cheek flushed as he talked. Looking at him, she began to wonder if the doctors could be right—if there were not too much life and energy here to be the prey of death.

'I am so glad you are well enough to walk in the garden,' she said.

'I struggle for that every day; the air and sunlight and

flowers do me more good than doctor's stuff. Dear old garden ! Do you remember our moonlight waltzes ?

'I shall never forget them.'

'And the mawkish "Prima Donna" ? One of the regimental bands played that unforgotten waltz one day at a review, and at the first bar I felt as if somebody had stabbed me. The melody brought back the old time, and you were resting lightly on my arm as we went slowly round upon the grass. Well, I suppose it is something for a man to be able to say that, for two months of his life, he was utterly happy. Will you come for a stroll round the garden ? May I lean upon your shoulder as I do on Flossie's ?

'Pray do.'

They walked slowly along the narrow path by the hazels. This part of the garden was white and rosy with apple-blossoms, and perfumed with wallflowers. The bright glad sunshine, the happy look of the flowers, tortured Barbara's heart. It was as if there was gladness everywhere, although he was so soon to die.

They came to the corner where the lilies of the valley grew under the fig-tree, whose crinkled leaves were just unfolding.

'How well I remember this spot,' he said, stopping to take breath, 'and your telling me how you buried your canary here, under the lilies ! Have you forgotten ?

'No,' she said ; 'I buried something here afterwards, something dearer than my canary, though I was foolish enough to be almost heart-broken when he died.'

'Another favourite bird ?

'Your letters. I kept them till my wedding morning, and then I made up my mind to burn them. But I had not the heart to do it. So I came here at daybreak, and dug a grave, dug the grave of my first love. The lilies are growing over your letters, George ; the letters that once made me so happy, and the last cruel letter that broke my heart.'

'That cruelty was meant for kindness, Barbara. You can never know the struggle it cost me to write that letter.'

'Well, it changed our fate, that was all. Suppose, instead of doing what you thought your duty, and writing as you did, you had said, "I am in great trouble. Come and be my wife !" I should have gone out to you by the next steamer, just as I went to Southampton.'

'And you would have found me a disgraced man, without a hope of promotion ; a pauper, without a chance of fortune ; and you would have had good cause to think me the meanest hound in India.'

'I would have trusted you against all the world.'

'Dear love, I was not base enough to profit by such trustfulness ; that was why I wrote as I did, vaguely, so that my letter should not be an appeal to your generosity.'

They went slowly along by the wall, and the southern border which pretended to grow strawberries, and succeeded admirably in producing groundsell; groundsell with which Flossie waged an intermittent warfare, and which always got the better of her; for it grew while she was asleep, and waxed strong in her every interval of idleness.

One circuit of the half-acre garden was now as much as George Leland could manage. He was glad to go in and lie down presently, and then Barbara left him to her sister's care.

It was a day full of sadness. Even Mrs. Trevornock's delight in her grandson was damped by her sorrow for that brave spirit passing away. She and Flossie took it in turns to sit with the invalid, while Barbara sat alone in her mother's bedroom with her baby on her lap. She had made her journey from the far western point of England to see George Leland once more; but she submitted quietly to remain away from him in these last sad hours, while others tended him and kept him company. She could not trust herself to watch by him as Flossie watched; she could not have so schooled her countenance, so governed her voice. Her sorrow must have burst from her in some sudden passion which would have given a new agony to the dying man.

She sat by the open window while the sun went down behind distant spires and chimneys, and the evening shadows crept into the room; sat there thinking of the past, and the happy girlish days when she had stood before yonder looking-glass decking herself for an evening's pleasure with her betrothed—opera, or play, or concert—a slender figure, robed in white, with flowers in her hair, the fond mother waiting upon her, and hanging about her, and admiring her all the time; and impatient Flossie standing by imploring to be hooked or pinned, and protesting she should never be ready when the cab came to fetch them; and then the lover's resonant voice calling at the foot of the little staircase.

And he lay dying in the room where they two had been so happy together, and she was another man's wife!

There was an awful stillness in the house. No one came near her, except Gilmore, who brought her a cup of tea, and made the baby a cosy nest on Mrs. Trevornock's bed.

'Shall I bring candles, ma'am?' asked Gilmore, when her little charge had been hushed and patted and wheedled to sleep. 'It's so dismal for you sitting up here alone in the dark.'

'No, thank you, Gilmore. I'd rather be as I am.'

So Gilmore curtsied and retired, and Barbara was alone once more.

She had her mother's Testament open before her, the large print clearly visible in the gloaming to eyes familiar with the text:

'I am the resurrection and the life: he that believeth in Me, though he were dead, yet shall he live.'

The moon had risen—a pale young moon—above opening bloom and folded leaf; the evening was wearing on towards night, when Flossie opened the door, and came creeping up to Barbara, her face blotted with tears.

'Come,' she sobbed; 'mother says he is sinking fast. And he would like to see you once more.'

Barbara rose and went without a word.

The garden window was open wide to the soft moonlit sky. There was a shaded lamp near the bed on which George Leland lay; and by the dim light Barbara saw the awful change in his face, the glazing eye, the cold gray hue of the cheek. She knelt by the bed, and he stretched out his hands to her feebly, as if he were groping for something beyond his reach, till one hand rested on her forehead.

'Is this Barbara?'

'Yes.'

'Thank God! Barbara and England! I thought I was in the hospital at Lucknow, and that there were black faces round my bed. To die at home; to hear your voice at last. That is happiness.'

Later, awakening from a brief sleep, he murmured, 'Lycurgus decreed that only the Spartans who had fought for their country were to be buried in red cloth and olive-leaves, and to have their names inscribed upon their tombs. In that rude age valour was virtue.' Then, after an interval in which he lay with half-closed eyes, murmuring strange snatches of speech, sometimes the name of a brother officer—Chamberlain, Seaton, Light—sometimes the word of command to his own men, he lifted himself suddenly from his pillow, opened his eyes, looked at Barbara long and earnestly, and then, extending his wasted arms, drew her to his breast and kissed her pale lips, murmuring, 'This once, love, and for the last time. Dearest, if in a better world we see and know those whom we have loved on earth, this is not parting.'

She knelt for a long time by his bed, he lying sometimes in silence, sometimes with intervals of wandering speech, sometimes with gleams of consciousness; but through all the feeble hand held hers, as if there were comfort in her touch. And thus, at the stroke of midnight, he passed from a brief interval of troubled sleep to the placid slumber which knows no earthly waking.

EPILOGUE.

TEN years have come and gone since George Leland was laid in his last rest in the Somersetshire churchyard, where his mother and father had been buried before him. The Indian Mutiny has become history: Outram, the Bayard of India, is lying in Westminster Abbey; Clyde, too, is gone, full of years and of honours; Napier is winning new laurels on a strange soil. The world is altered and aged by a decade. Society has grown more artistic, and perhaps more artificial. To the old-fashioned port-and-sherry period has succeeded a milder age of hock and claret. Men drink less, women more. The value of a sovereign has diminished by thirty per cent. Everybody worth speaking of is rich. Everybody worth mention has newly furnished his house, and taken to collecting old china.

But as in the days of the Commonwealth architecture in Cornwall remained still pretty much what it had been in the reign of Elizabeth, so now the old house on the moor is slow to follow the caprices of London fashion. Everything at Penruth Place has the same grave and sober air as of old—the same neutral tints, dull grays, and faded greens predominate in the furniture, making an admirable background for the wealth of exquisite flowers with which Barbara Penruth loves to decorate her rooms.

Yet, though the house is grave and gray as of old, there is now within its walls all the life and gladness of a large household and a happy band of light-hearted children. The ten-year-old heir is not alone in his nursery; there are two slender blue-eyed girls, with long fair hair, either of whom might have sat for Millais' picture of 'My First Sermon.' There is a toddling boy-baby, unanimously pronounced the very finest thing in babies, an entirely new development of infantine life, and immeasurably superior to the infant-heir about whom so much fuss was made ten years ago. Then there are Mark's two tall lads from Helstone Grammar-school, and the eldest son, Jack, home from Oxford for a seemingly interminable vacation which he calls 'the Long,' a period ostensibly employed in coaching with a tutor, but the greater part of which is devoted to dogs, horses, and guns. And lastly, there are two fairy-like girls of seven and five years, and one ridiculously chubby boy aged two, who also claim Mark for father.

Who is Mark's second wife and the mother of these new and tender sprouts upon the family tree of Penruth? Who but this neat little matron, who rides to hounds in a short olive-green habit and a tall chimney-pot hat, who is always first in the scurry, and who needs no guide to show her the shortest way across country. This fearless rider, this happy little matron, is Flossie, who, after Mark had patiently courted her for a period of between three and four years, during which he bore more

snubbing and ridicule than ever a man endured from a sharp-tongued mistress, finally relented one day, as she and Mark were waiting for the hounds in a sheltered corner beside a copse, and promised to make him unutterably happy for the rest of his life.

She has kept her promise nobly : Mark is as happy and as true-hearted as he was once false and miserable. The quarries have prospered with the growing prosperity of the building trade ; and Mark, who is now a partner in the business, has become a rich man. He has built himself a house with a windy bell-tower on the hill outside Launceston, and looks down upon a lower world from brand-new plate-glass windows. Everything in Flossie's house contrasts curiously with the surroundings of her sister. Furniture and ornaments are the essence of newness, and are faintly suggestive of the fancy repository in the Walworth-road. The prismatic hues of much Bohemian glass glorify the drawing-room, where proofs after Landseer stand darkly out against a white-and-gold paper, and upon whose carpet all Flora's gems are represented in their gayest colours. Launceston matrons who have never envied Barbara her grand old Tudor house feel the pangs of the covetous when they behold Mrs. Mark Penruth's plate-glass windows and French china shepherdesses.

And Barbara is happy. Her cup is filled to the brim with domestic joys : the love of little children, who grow dearer to her and fill her life more completely day by day ; the love of her proud and happy mother, on whose gentle face the shadows of time fall so lightly that she is prettier with gray hair than she was when her dark-brown tresses showed no streak of silver ; the deep affection of a husband who has won her heart by long years of unchanging fidelity, unselfish devotion. She has these blessings, and knows their worth, and is grateful to the God who, in withholding something, has yet given so much. And when memory, awakened by a sound, an image, a vagrant thought, wanders back to the passionate hopes and dreams of her girlhood, she sees the picture of the past in a tender light which is not all sorrow and bitterness.

'My hero !' she says to herself sometimes. 'I am proud to have loved him, and to have been beloved by him ; proud to remember how he lived and how he died.'

He is something in her life still, an ever-abiding influence ; for the dead we have truly loved have their part in our lives to the end. The memory of him is interwoven with the very fabric of her mind. And thus, in the calm afternoon light of a simple domestic life, loving and beloved, Barbara's story closes.

Thomas Trevornock, still familiarly described by Flossie as Mr. T., has gone to his last earthly rest. He died not exactly in the odour of sanctity, but at a most convenient season, and just

in time to escape possible involvement in a criminal prosecution on account of certain artful and deeply-laid schemes in the silver-mining line, which same process brought Mr. Maulford's ruddy locks under the shears of the prison barber, and most abruptly put a fullstop, or at least a colon, in the shape of seven years' penal servitude, to that clever gentleman's promising career. In vain did Lewis Maulford's counsel enlarge upon the youthful innocence of his client; in vain portray, with pathetic eloquence, the affliction of a widowed mother, harshly deprived of the most devoted and dutiful of sons. A heartless jury found the prisoner guilty, and an equally heartless judge pronounced the sternest sentence which the law allowed. Happily for the honour of the Penruths, the junior partner had been the active agent in these fraudulent endeavours to achieve fortune, and Mr. Trevornock's name was not blazoned in the public prints, or bandied on the lips of counsel. He may have been innocent of any knowledge of, or participation in, Lewis Maulford's schemes, although his office had been used by that gentleman as a base of operations.

Miss Penruth has taken up her permanent abode in one of the most commanding terraces that overlook Plymouth Hoe. From that altitude, as from a citadel, she surveys a world which is not worthy of her, and provides tea, toast, and other light refreshments for a select and evangelical few every Tuesday evening at eight.

Mrs. Trevornock still retains the cottage at Camberwell, though the greater part of her life is spent at Place, where her grandchildren adore her, and where she is as dear to her daughter's husband and as popular with the entire household as if the name of mother-in-law had never been made a word of fear.

The Camberwell home is a pleasant shelter for Mark and Flossie when they give themselves a fortnight's holiday in London, and go the round of the West-end theatres. Barbara and her children sometimes visit there, and sit in the old wicker chairs on the lawn, which seem so small to eyes accustomed to the wide lawns and winding shrubbery walks at Place. But it is grandmamma's garden, and, as such, has a certain dignity and distinction in the children's eyes, to say nothing of the greater liberty for mischief which they enjoy here, where there is no stern Scotch gardener to complain of their depredations, or to bewail the havoc they make.

The lilies of the valley bloom and multiply above the spot where Barbara buried her love-letters, and no one knows of the broken story they cover. In every life, even that which seems brightest and fairest, there is some such grave where dead hopes and unfulfilled dreams lie buried.

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